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Representing black Britain : black images on British television from 1936 to the present day

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REPRESENTING BLACK BRITAIN

BLACK IMAGES ON BRITISH TELEVISION

FROM 1936 TO THE PRESENT DAY

VOLUME ONE

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Abstract

This thesis examines the history of Black representation on British television from 1936 to the present day. Through archival research, it traces Black people's involvement in British television, both on and off screen. The study involves a detailed review of various debates around the history and future of race and representation on television. It also focuses on various issues related to British race relations, the structure of British broadcasting, television policy and the ideological and social construction of 'race'. Although the project is a historical survey with a social and cultural emphasis, it also considers the future of television images of Blackness within the context of deregulation, globalisation and the move towards a federal Europe. As such, the thesis brings us up to date and intersects with aspects of sociology, cultural and media studies and studies of race and ethnicity.

The project draws, in part, on a number of original interviews conducted by the author with key Black people involved in the British television industry (actors, commissioning editors, producers, academics, film-makers). It also provides a number of detailed case studies of selected television programmes. The genres discussed include documentary, news, comedy, sport, variety, drama and film. The central thesis suggests that the portrayal of Black people on-screen has been marginalised and confined to a narrow repertoire of (stereo)types underpinned by popular assumptions of what 'Blackness' or 'Black-Britishness' constitute. It argues that the programmes in which Black people have appeared, have signified key moments in the 'racialisation' of British society; moments when the presence of 'race' itself has been realised. But it also argues that, far from being passive to these exclusionary and limiting processes, Black people in Britain have actively mounted a series of individual and collective strategic interventions in order to tackle institutional discrimination and gain media

representation, employment and access.

The project has been supervised by Professor Stuart Hall (formerly of the Open University's Sociology department) and June Givanni (former Head of the African-Caribbean Unit at the British Film Institute). It draws on, and is an extension of, earlier research conducted as part of the British Film Institute's 'Black and White in Colour' Project in 1992.

Introduction

British television was installed on a wide-scale basis in the 1950s - at the same time as the

mass migration of people from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia. My central concern in

this study, is with how the arrival of these 'new communities' impacted on Britain and how

this was played out on-screen. I will look at how images of Black people have been

constructed on television since the 1950s, although I do refer back to those few television

representations of Black people prior to that.[1] The history of Black representation on British

television is, in fact, a long and complex one. Black people were represented on British

television on the first day of transmission when Josephine Baker participated in one of John

Logie Baird's experimental television broadcasts from his London studio in October 1933.

Three days later (2 November, 1936) saw the opening of the BBC's television service in which

the comic minstrel duo, Buck and Bubbles, put on a show for a predominantly White audience.

Black people have been on-screen, in one way or another, ever since.

Much of the earlier part of this history is unknown, or has only occasionally been documented

in any detailed way (Pines, 1992). This lack of recall can be attributed to three main factors:

first, there is a paucity of early (up to the 1960s) archive material; secondly, the cultural status

and significance of television in these early years was not valued in the same way as other

visual mediums such as cinema; and thirdly, there is a popular assumption that Black

representations on British television are only a recent phenomenon (i.e. late 1970s onwards).

The impression of an easily accessible, comprehensive and lovingly cultivated television

archive, on which a critical history could be solidly based, is largely a myth (see Bryant, 1989,

Houston, 1994, and Scannell and Cardiff, 1991). On a more practical level, the live production

of output (mainly in the embryonic years of television) inhibited archive preservation. Early

transmissions were live since no adequate technology for recording existed, and 'telerecording'

existed sparingly. The switch from mainly live to mainly pre-recorded programmes came in the

1970s. However, there still existed what Steve Bryant has called an 'embryonic archival

policy' whereby, for instance, only the first couple of episodes in a long-running series would

be recorded. And while some programmes were deemed more worthy of preservation (such as

the Queen's Coronation in 1953), the importance of storing most programmes was not fully

realised or insisted on at the time. The dearth in surviving television material has been a

practical hurdle which has encouraged a sporadic and often 'patchy' interpretation of the

history of Black representation on British television. For today's television researchers there is

the obvious problem of knowing, in a first-hand way, what many of the early programmes

contained. Here, the testimonies of those involved in the productions at the time (such as those

laid out in Jim Pines' Black and White in Colour) are of critical importance as 'social

documents'.[2]

Aim and Scope of the Study

This project aims to chronicle a history, while also providing a social and cultural analysis. My

basic aim is to: 1) *identify* the distinctive and general ways in which Black people have been

represented on British television; 2) *describe* the ways in which those representations have

been organised, produced and communicated; and 3) *explain* and *address* possible connections

between particular representations (signs) and socially ascribed meanings (sense) (Corner in

Briggs and Cobley, 1998:244). I would loosely define my approach as discursive, since it is

essentially concerned with the politics of cultural representation. Here, television is determined

as a key representational system which produces culture and its meanings. My emphasis is

also on historical specificity in order to locate different modes of representation in the

historical context within which they were produced (see Hall, 1997:6, for a definition of the

difference between discursive and semiotic approaches to cultural analysis). Since cultural

meanings cannot be disassociated from 'real life', and representations 'organize and regulate

social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects' (Hall,

1997:3), I have approached various television programmes not simply as historical documents,

but as part of what we have come to know and understand about 'race'. Since the emphasis in

this study is on the matter of 'representation', most of what I have outlined is, in fact, how

different programme-makers have constructed 'images of Blackness'. In this sense, the study is

not a celebratory history of Black representation, nor an analysis of how Black people 'really

are'. It examines what we have come to know about 'Blackness' and indeed 'Britishness', and

how our knowledge of the reality of 'race' (which is formed through representation) has been

shaped by television.

In this instance, I use the term 'race' not simply to refer to the 'new communities', but also to

the social construction of ideas related to different ethnic and cultural groups and formations. I

therefore treat the word 'race' as an analytical concept, which is why it can so often be found

cased in inverted commas (see Miles, 1993). Whilst all the texts in this study profile the Black

subject, the broader issue of racial and cultural identity is raised. The normalising of Whiteness

and the projection of the word 'race' onto Black communities alone, has made the agencies of

representation active players in the development of 'race' as a trope relevant, in the main, to

non-White groups. As Phil Cohen has reminded us, "race'... is an ideological construct, not an

empirical social category; as such it signifies a set of imaginary properties of inheritance which

fix and legitimate real positions of social domination or subordination in terms of genealogies of

generic difference' (Cohen in Cohen and Bains, 1988:23). Of course, racism is not a static

phenomenon and racism is produced and reproduced through various spheres - through the

media, through political discourse, through education, and so on: my focus is on how television

positions itself in relation to 'race' and asks what role the medium might play in its ideological

construction.

This is a conceptual and historical survey but also brings us up to date to consider current

issues around nationalism, global media and deregulation with specific reference to Black

representation, audiences and media workers. There are, roughly speaking, three main

trajectories which I hope to have 'knitted together' as far as possible. These are: 1) the

sociopolitical context of Black Britain; 2) textual matters in terms of how Black people have

been represented on-screen; and 3) off-screen matters in relation to the institutional context

and the role Black people have played behind the scenes. The study therefore has a historical,

institutional and political focus. Such a project entails generalisations and specification,

overviews and detail. For example, it does, on some occasions, home in on the specific

dynamics and internal workings of a selected text, and on others, stands back to consider the

'wider picture' and the general shifts and preoccupations of a given time. I am primarily

concerned with media form and content rather than with structural imperatives although I do

point to matters of employment, commissioning structures and access. To this degree, I have

attempted, where possible, to interconnect questions of media form with questions of media

production and, to a lesser degree, media consumption (although I do acknowledge that the

complex processes and issues around spectatorship are beyond the scope of this thesis).

Methodological Approaches

Before introducing the chapters, I want to make a few points about the terminology and

methodological approaches I have used. This research began in March 1994, when a series of

meetings were held between Stuart Hall, June Givanni and myself, in which we discussed the

proposed area of research. These early sessions were critical in order to negotiate a framework,

research paradigm and suitable methodological approach for the project. Certain decisions

needed to be made, even at this early stage. We negotiated, for example, the extent to which

non-British programmes could be considered; how much detail could be provided on the

history of Black Britain; who would be useful interviewees that might be able to provide a

fresh and knowledgeable perspective on the political and television history; which genres were

to be covered and in what order. Following these preliminary discussions, and my drafting of

each chapter, June and Stuart provided detailed feedback on first, second (and sometimes third)

drafts of each of the chapters I had written.

Many studies on race and representation have primarily focused on the African-Caribbean

experience, although reference is occasionally made to Asian representations or Asian artists.

By contrast, I consider representations of both Asians and African-Caribbeans. Where I am

talking about the dominant approaches in representations of African-Caribbeans and Asians in

general, I use the word 'Black'. The use of this organisational category is not meant to suggest

that the ideologies and images which circulate around 'Asianness' and 'African-Caribbeanness'

are the same. There are, in fact, important similarities and differences in the ways in which

each ethnicity/community has been addressed and portrayed. As such, I have made it clear

when I am talking specifically about African-Caribbean or Asian people.

There are, of course, further important sub-groupings which could be made between Pakistanis and Indians, Africans and West Indians, although again, such detail is beyond the scope of this study (although in Chapters 3 and 4, I do pay particular attention to some of the ways in which British-Muslims have been represented). Nevertheless, I recognise that race in general and Blackness in particular, exists and is represented through a range of variables such as class, religion, gender and sexuality. I do consider these variables in some chapters (for example, the ways in which African-Caribbean men are represented in sport, the ways in which Asian women are depicted in social documentary), but these are not the defining variables of the research. Rather, my primary concern is with 'race', ethnicity and national identity in relation to Britain's Black communities and Britishness. I sometimes refer to 'Blackness' or 'Whiteness', although this is not to infer that these are terms which can simply or conclusively be defined. I also use the phrases 'White/Black-produced', 'Black programme', 'Black production' although again, these are not strict definitions. Rather, they indicate where a significant amount of those involved in the production of a text, or who form part of an intended audience, are predominantly 'White' or 'Black'. In general, these are loose terms which are not meant to imply that any production or audience is ever simply or exclusively 'White' or 'Black'.

The interviews which I conducted as part of the research were never intended to form the basis of the project, but they certainly provided a lot of useful background material and information on specific and general historical contexts (see Appendix A for full transcripts of most of the interviews). The interviewees included actors, commissioning editors, independent producers and cultural critics, some of whom had never been formally interviewed about a history that they themselves were part of. Intensive periods of viewing were a central part of the research,

as was a great deal of consultation with primary and secondary sources. I also had to collate

and sift through existing archival data (scripts, programmes, production details), and keep

abreast of developments within British broadcasting (at a rapidly changing and exciting period

in the television industry).

In pulling these different strands and methodological approaches together, the thesis aims to

provide an exploratory and detailed account of the Black presence on British television.

Whilst it is possible to identify a set of practices around television's representation of Black

people, this has also been diverse and varied, so that there have been a number of different and

often contradictory representations of 'race' both within and between texts, and across and

within historical moments. In order to work through these differences, I have broken the study

down by genre and in the case of documentary and actuality programming (which I begin

with), by historical period as well. I have tried to engage with a spectrum of formats, contexts

and genres. Of course, I recognise that there are some areas of programming which have not

been considered, although this is not to suggest that they are not as important as those which

have. For example, I have not looked in any great detail at childrens' or schools programming

and I have not looked at advertising. Although I have broken down the research by genre, it

should be noted that our understanding of 'Whiteness' and 'Blackness' is also formed through

where these are not represented. The fact that Blacks are rarely seen in adverts, clearly says

something about how Blacks are more generally represented and how wider impressions of

them are formed.[3] So whilst I have attempted to make this study as comprehensive and

detailed as possible, the aim of the study is more to identify a 'racialized regime of

representation' (Hall, 1997:245), than to serve as a catalogue or encyclopaedia of Black images

on British television.[4]

Each chapter (except Chapters 1, 7 and 10) provides at least two detailed case studies. Of course, the texts are purely of my own choice, although I have tried, in each of the relevant chapters, to offer some rationale for my selection - Why has this programme been chosen? What is it designed to show? How representative or exceptional is it? What does it help us to understand about the patterns of Black representation? Some programmes have been selected for obvious reasons (e.g. the first documentary to address the issue of race in Britain (**Has Britain A Colour Bar?**), the important landmark programmes which raised important debates and questions about race and representation (**Till Death Us Do Part, The Black and White Minstrel Show, Fable**)), while others are perhaps less obvious choices but ones which I consider to be important texts in this history (**Prime Suspect, Holding On, This Life, Jewel in the Crown**). Although I have clearly signposted the programmes selected as 'case studies', each chapter does, in fact, look at a number of different programmes in varying amounts of detail. But the project is more than just a response to texts: it is the result of detailed interviews with key players in the television industry; of close and considered reading of debates around the area of race and representation; of reviews of media policy and television legislation, and so on.

Each chapter loosely follows a chronological approach, although sometimes this is as general as decades, and at others as specific as year. I have provided details of channels and transmission dates (Tx:) as specifically and comprehensively as possible. In some instances, the date span is incomplete (i.e. 1997-), which usually means that the series is still running or due for another series, but in a few cases, it simply means that I have been unable to find the exact end transmission date. Some transmission dates give details of precise days and months (i.e.

12.3.97), while others only note the year (i.e. 1997) or the month (i.e. 3.97). Programme and

film titles are presented in bold, book titles are underlined and film and press journals are

indicated by italics. When I refer to films, I have included details of the year of production (and

sometimes the television transmission date) and, in most cases, the production company

(Prod:) and the director (Dir:).

Of course, my focus is on terrestrial television, although I do make a few references (mainly to

be found in the additional notes at the end of each chapter) to satellite and cable programmes

(these can mostly be found in Chapter 5 on comedy and Chapter 6 on sport). Considerations

of length and accessibility have also meant that the research is confined, almost totally, to

networked programmes, although a few regional and local programmes are discussed. These can

mostly be found in Chapter 4 (news) and Chapter 3 (specific Black-targeted programmes). Of

course, some of those regions which are more densely-populated with distinct Black

communities, do provide regional Black programmes which I have not commented on in any

great detail (e.g. Central Television broadcasts a daily ten-minute Asian programme, **Asian**

Eye). I have only used a few examples of non-British produced programmes, and only when

they have been screened on British television and when I think they add something important

to a particular discussion or explanation.

I have avoided depending too heavily on statistical data. There are, in fact, an abundance of

figures available, particularly audience surveys on what viewers think about the ways in which

'race' is handled on television, and data from content analysis which counts the quantity of

representation, However, I think many of these 'findings' provide limited information on the

very complex matter of representation (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, I would question whether

numerical representation (i.e. how many Black people appear in a programme) is as important

as cultural significance. I am far more concerned with the *types* of images used to depict Black

people. I have therefore included only a small amount of statistical data in the appendices (e.g.

channels most watched by ethnic minorities, ethnic minorities' attitudes to television, etc.),

although this is more for general interest than to support any specific arguments which I have

presented.

Outline of Chapters

The same structure has been used in all chapters, with these exceptions: Chapter 1 (an

introductory chapter which deals with the broader social and broadcasting contexts and with

academic readings of race and representation); Chapter 9 (which examines Black-British film in

relation to television and has a slightly heavier institutional emphasis); and Chapter 10 (the

final chapter which acts as a summary and conclusion). Each chapter introduces new issues

and debates, although I have tried to incorporate all of the issues raised into my general

arguments. So, for example, the first genre chapter on television documentary up to the 1970s,

introduces the issues of public service broadcasting, realism and accountability; the next

chapter on documentary from the 1970s to the 1990s, raises issues around the developing

oppositional campaigns mounted by collective and individual Black media workers or critics;

Chapter 6 on sport pays emphasis to issues around Black masculinity, the body and the

science of race. Of course, in each chapter I have tried to stick as near as possible to the

particular genre on which the chapter is based. I have tried to reserve additional information,

references and debates about Black representation in general, broadcasting legislation and the

sociopolitical context for Chapter 1 (the introduction), Chapter 10 (the conclusion) and the

notes at the end of each chapter. In keeping each chapter 'genre-specific', I have not focused

too much on individual figures in the history. The important exceptions here can be found in Chapter 5 (comedy) where I pay some attention to the work of Lenny Henry and Chapter 6 (sport), which is difficult to analyse in terms of specific programmes, and which is itself a very personality-led genre.

I will give a brief chapter outline here. Chapter 1 focuses on two main areas: the first, looks at the sociopolitical context of the Black presence in Britain. It will, by decade, trace the key events, political circumstances and cultural climate which have framed 'Black Britain' since the 1940s. It will also note the dominant changes in popular British attitudes towards 'race' and 'race relations'. The second part of this preliminary chapter offers an overview of the existing work concerning Black representation on television, and begins to present some of the important and influential debates in the field. The rest of the thesis is split into three parts: Part One looks at actuality (news and documentary) programmes; Part Two covers a range of entertainment/fictional genres; and Part Three presents the conclusion.

Chapter 2 is the first of two chapters which deals specifically with documentary and actuality programming. In this, I trace the documentary developments from the 1950s until the late 1960s and cite the importance of Enoch Powell in transforming the public debate about race and immigration in new and unprecedented ways towards the end of that period. Chapter 3 takes us up to the late 1990s, and the focus here shifts from Black people's dominant exclusion in the programmes looked at in Chapter 2, to the campaigns and struggles by Black people themselves to gain media access and tackle institutional discrimination in terms of on-screen imagery and employment in the media. Here I will note the importance of various campaigns such as those conducted by the Campaign Against Racism in the Media and the

Black Media Workers Association in publicising the issue of Black representation and equality and in the subsequent arrival of Channel 4 in 1982. Although I will address the issues around Channel 4's mandate, Black programming and multicultural units in Chapter 3, my emphasis will remain with documentary representations of Black Britons in the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter 4 will extend some of the debates I have already raised in relation to documentary around bias, accountability and balance, but this time in relation to television news. In particular, I focus on the question of balance in relation to how extreme Right-wing groups have been granted television access. I go on to look at the ways in which the 1980s urban riots/rebellions and 1995 Bradford riot were presented on the news. I will also, uncharacteristically, move away from the British context to consider some of the ways in which foreign news is constructed, paying particular attention to coverage of 'crises' in the Southern hemisphere.

If the thesis can be considered in stages, then it is here that we move on to the second stage, because Chapters 5, 6 and 7 focus on comedy, light entertainment and sport respectively, or what I have called 'the body genres'. In Chapter 5, I introduce the issue of 'light entertainment' and I continue my basic argument that all television genres are important for the ways in which they shape (rather than simply reflect) 'reality' and attitudes towards 'race'. This is an argument which I develop in the next chapter. Chapter 6 is altogether a more extensive chapter because it considers both how Black people have been represented in light entertainment, variety and music, but also the wider issue of how young Black Britons have been at the forefront of some of the most exciting expressions of 'Black-Britishness'. Questions of style, national identity and biological readings of race are all touched on in Chapter 6, but continue to be explored in Chapter 7 on sport. Here, I look at some of the ways

in which various Black-British sporting stars have been represented on television as part of a

wider British sporting culture. I also consider the more general issue of stereotypes and the

ambivalent ways in which they can be constructed. The next stage of Part Two turns to drama

(Chapter 8) and film (Chapter 9) which have been limiting yet critical spaces for Black media

workers and for alternative representations of race and race relations. Chapter 9, which

addresses various questions of institutional context (policy, recent industry trends etc.) paves

the way for some of the arguments I conclude with in Chapter 10 (Part Three). Here, I will

summarise my main findings and arguments and consider the type of future we can hope for in

relation to Black representation on British television.

NOTES

[1] The BBC began as the British Broadcasting Company, receiving its licence to broadcast on 18 January, 1922. In December 1922, Reith became the BBC's first Director-General. Reith firmly believed that the BBC should function as an impartial, quality, publicly responsible cultural institution, which should educate and entertain, rather than pandering to sensationalism or simply giving 'the people' what they want. British television can be dated back to 1924, when John Logie Baird produced a series of experimental broadcasts. These continued into the 1930s, and in January 1935, BBCTV was recommended to be set up as a public service. This was followed by a series of studio broadcasts and short films in 1936. By 1939, a mere 20,000 sets had been installed for private consumption (Bell in Corner, 1986:66). The service was forced to shut down on 31.8.39 because of the Second World War (1939-45), but resumed on 7.6.46. This next phase began with a number of broadcasts including sports tournaments and dramatic plays. In 1947, there were a number of outside broadcasts including Royal Weddings, Ascot and the Radiolympia Exhibition in October 1947 in which a number of Black variety artists starred. D.W Griffiths' **Birth of A Nation** was also screened in this year (Tx:7.7.47) (it was later screened on Channel 4 on 9.9.93, with an introduction by Paul Gilroy). By the 1950s, British television had become more widely available. Its popularity was further boosted by the live broadcast of the Queen's Coronation on 2.6.53. In 1953, nearly 2 million licenses were registered (approximately 20% of all households) and this rose to 10 million by the end of the 1950s (see Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, UK: Oxford, Vol.1 (1961), Vol.2 (1965), Vol.3 (1979), Vol.4 (1979).

[2] Pines' book Black and White in Colour accompanied a season of archive and specially made programmes on BBC2 (27 June and 3 July, 1992), which celebrated the history of Black representation on British and American television. The season began with the two part BFI-produced documentary **Black and White in Colour** (Tx:27.6.92, 30.6.92) which was narrated by Stuart Hall and directed by Isaac Julien. The documentary was shortlisted for the Commission for Racial Equality's 1992 Race in the Media Award for Best TV Documentary and was nominated for the British Film Institute's award for Archival Achievement (see Appendix B). The 'Black and White in Colour: Prospects for black intervention in television' conference was held at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts in November,1992.

[3] One of the first all-cast Black-British adverts was for McDonalds and was screened in May, 1998.

[4] June Givanni's compilation Black Film and Video List (1992) and Jim Pines' Black and White in Colour (1992) are useful for giving a more chronological and detailed sense of Black-British film and television

history. Tise Vahimagi's compilation <u>British Television</u> (1994) is also useful as a more general list of selected programmes broadcast on British television since the 1930s.

Chapter One

Television, History and 'Black Britain': Questions of Context

This is an appropriate moment in which to look back at the history of Black representation on

British television. This year (1998) marks the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of *Empire*

Windrush (22 June, 1948) which symbolised the inauguration of post-war mass migration and

the 'coming to the homeland' (or in the case of those who had served Britain during the Second

World War, the 'return to the homeland') for Black colonial people to Britain. It is also a

moment in which the 'age of television' is reaching an important juncture, due to the emergence

of new and revolutionary information and communication technologies. This will have

important effects on the framework of established broadcasting legislation, on notions of

'public service', and on the ways in which we are each located in the new communication and

information world. Television's 'traditional' modes of policy and address are currently under

intense review and subject to further changes as interactivity, accessibility, diversity and

convergence[1] are becoming *the* characteristics of the postmodern media age. It is this 'pull'

between the past (Britain's post-imperial history in relation to her Black communities and the

history of British television), and the future (of Black Britain fifty years on and of British

television in the context of wider technological change), which forms the basis of this review. It

is neither my aim to provide a comprehensive guide to race relations in Britain, nor to outline

the complicated and shifting qualities of television, but rather to point to the necessary

connections between historical tradition, the unstable present and what will inevitably be a

dramatic future in terms of how Black people are located and locate themselves in cultural (and

specifically television) representation.

There are two main sections in this opening chapter. In the first, I will map out some of the key events and shifts in the historical, social and political contexts of Asian and African-Caribbean communities in Britain. This involves looking at some of the different ways in which Black-British people have historically been understood, or articulated themselves, in social and political life. In the second section, I will look at some of the critical issues and theoretical approaches around the academic study of 'race' and representation. Here, I will consider why the area of representation in general, and television in particular, have been identified as important for the ways in which they represent 'race' and why, consequently, they have been considered as a critical public space for contestation over identity, equality and nationality.

Although this study is essentially concerned with the production and decoding of meanings and representations of 'race' on television, I want to use this preparatory chapter as an opportunity to introduce some of the issues of context and the conceptual framework around race and representation on television. Of course, I aim, as much as possible, to make the issues I raise here form an integral part of and background to the entire thesis. Since images don't simply operate in a social or political vacuum, the context in which they are seen and the timing of their production is just as important as the types of images which are produced. The television text can most usefully be seen as a 'social object', rather than 'wrenched out of history, given autonomy, cast adrift from context into a sea of significatory interplay which need never be referred back to the historical specificities of the moment of production' (Medhurst in Higson, 1996:119). Indeed, at some stage, the most important cultural and political shifts of the twentieth century, have intersected with and been affected by the

medium of television. In any case, 'culture', of which representation is an important part, is just as 'constitutive of the social world as economic or political processes' (du Gay et al, 1997:2). Representation gives us a sense of what our social experience and lived realities are about. Stuart Hall has contested the notion that 'black life is lived experience outside of representation' when he argues that, 'it is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are. There is no escape from the politics of representation' (Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:473). The necessarily deeply political mediations between reality and representation are what can make the study of media, 'race' and society a revealing space.

The seductiveness of applying the logic and sensibilities of the present to our interpretations of the past is clear, and an accurate and comprehensive periodization of different versions of racisms is especially difficult given the interplay between their constantly shifting properties. But whilst 'we are in and of the moment that we are attempting to analyse, in and of the structures we employ to analyse' (Connor, 1989), historical reflections of the catalogue of images of Blackness may help us to decode the present and to determine the constructed nature of our sense of what experience and knowledge are. Historical work, although always partial and selective, can therefore be of use to those concerned with questions of memory and identity and, in this case, to all those who recognise the importance of excavating and tracing the ways in which 'Black Britain' has been and continues to be represented - in arguably the most central and powerful medium of the twentieth century. Some historical researchers have been criticised for *assuming* a history in their historical rewrites, by either over emphasising or overlooking the significance of certain moments and their politics to those involved in it at the time - or for assuming that newer representations or ideologies are always more enlightened,

liberal[2] and/or progressive (see Phillips in Givanni, 1995:63-72). Thus, to take for granted the assumption that television representations of Black people are *all* 'better' today than what came before; to presume that *all* early representations of Black people were formed on a racist premise, and to neglect the political culture out of which those representations were produced, is to simplify a very complex and convoluted history.[3] The nature of dependency between the past, present and future dissolves notions of a distinct 'now' and 'then' which have no connection or impact on one another. As such, incarnations of Blackness in the cultural field - and, for that matter, new modalities of racism - are inextricably connected to issues of memory, history and race. Thus, new attitudes towards 'race' - while they emerge in the present - are often tied to older conceptions of 'race' and racism from the past. But of course, one of the very facets of racist ideology is dependent on actively forgetting. It assumes that 'race' or racism is a new problem which only arrived here when 'the Blacks' did; that Britain's colonial and imperial past has nothing to do with newer forms of racism; and that 'race' and 'racism' operate on the margins of British society and can be made extricable from the internal dynamics of British society and politics (see Hall, 1978).

Section 1: Mapping Black Britain: The Sociopolitical Context

a) Post-war Immigration and Settlement

Although we can trace the presence of Black people in Britain back to the sixteenth century (Fryer, 1984), the mass migration of those from Africa, the Caribbean and the South Asian sub-continent (India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) to Europe and North America in the immediate post Second World War years, was a key historical moment in which 'the West' encountered Black people (Hall, 1997:239). Of course, approximately 10,000 Black men and women had also joined the British Armed Forces during the Second World War to fight - and sometimes die

- for the 'mother country' (see Fryer, 1984, Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Many of these Black

people were 'invited' to Britain in order to provide semi and unskilled work because of the

post-war labour shortage. They were, under the terms of the 1948 Nationality Act, entitled to

UK citizenship since they were members of Britain's colonies or former colonies. The 1950s

saw further requests from the Conservative Government for those from the Caribbean to come

to Britain to relieve its acute labour shortage in the public services (transport, health), and this

resulted in a second wave of immigration from the West Indies. But Black people's largely

poor employment and social status (low-paid work, multiple-occupancy in inner-city slum

houses, competing for jobs with the Irish and the Poles, etc.), together with the colonial legacy

and biologically and culturally essentialist racist notions of what it meant to be African,

Caribbean or Asian, encouraged a specific form of hostility (or, at the very least, a confused

response) towards New Commonwealth Black colonial immigrants, compared to White

'newcomers'.[4] On the one hand, there was a general sense of economic optimism due to the

post-war boom of the mid-1950s, and expressions of racism were yet to develop into a

defining and overriding feature of British Black/White relations. Black people were more likely

to be the subjects of curiosity. But the legacy of imperialism and subjection faced by colonial

migrants, together with the fact that in Britain, 'much more than in countries more accustomed

to immigration, an expectation of social conformity and a rejection of claims of distinct ethnic

identity' (Miles and Phizacklea, 1984:5) existed, prompted the divide between who/what was

seen as central, normal and universal versus what was perceived as marginal, alien and specific.

On the other hand, a number of important political changes during the 1950s, meant that

Britain experienced a turbulent period in home affairs, with immigration and decolonisation as

key issues in a post-war, welfare-state society. The Suez Crisis in April 1956, was

particularly significant for unhinging Britain's world standing. In that year, Christopher

Mayhew, the producer of a BBC series entitled **We The British**, summed up a general mood when he complained that, 'everyone thinks today that Britain can be pushed around' (*Radio Times*, 20.4.56:5).

The vestige of traditional articulations of nationhood began, not surprisingly, to manifest themselves in new ways in what was soon to become a post-colonial Britain. An awareness of 'race' in new forms of consciousness occurred alongside Britain's postcolonial crisis, and many saw the modality of 'race' as symptomatic of that decline (Gilroy, 1993b:22). The ideal of national singularity and the concept of a 'multicultural Britain' was clearly, for many, now difficult to stomach. The remnants of wartime nostalgia (or memories of social unity and Britain as an imperial power) coincided with or seemed, to many, to be contradicted by the wide-scale post-war migration of those from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. In short, many Black people arrived in Britain within the wider context of loss, fragmentation and decline, but soon began to be seen as a primary reason for it. Early indications of racial tension were most obviously witnessed in the Liverpool-based anti-Black riots of 1948 which were specifically targeted at Black seamen (it is estimated that there were about 8,000 Black people living in Liverpool in 1948, 30% of whom were seafarers). But there was also a more general 'colour bar' (for example, against Black students and seamen, in housing, hotels and restaurants, and in 'no go' areas marked by the "No Dogs, No Blacks, No Irish" slogan). This 'colour bar' had been in practice since the end of the First World War, and had only temporarily been redeemed when labour was needed for the war effort (although there was also evidence of a colour bar against Black service wo/men and skilled workers during the Second World War) (see Fryer, 1984:356-367).

By the mid-1950s, new fears and concerns about the Black presence in Britain had begun to emerge. As well as the panic around housing (both the lack of it, and the fact that some Black people were now - mostly through a shared 'kitty' system - beginning to purchase property), there was a new emphasis on 'personal habits', amoral lifestyles and cultural differences. There was talk about prostitution, drugs and sexual deviancy, and fears about miscegenation. More blatant and violent forms of racial hostility directed at a Black-British presence became evident (and were documented) later that decade. These included: the White riots in Camden (1954) and in North Kensington (or what was generally referred to as 'Notting Hill') (1958) and Nottingham (1958); the emergence of organised racism in the form of fascist groups such as the White Defence League (led by Colin Jordan), the British National Party (led by Andrew Fountaine) and the League of Empire Loyalists (led by A.K. Chesterton); the general abuse of black workers, particularly by Teddy Boys (spurred on by the White Defence League) which fed into new moral panics around teen hooligans and troubled youth (rather than about British racism); and the first acknowledged racial murder with the death of Kelso Cochrane, a Black carpenter in Notting Hill (May 1959). An ambivalent response towards immigrants persisted: on the one hand, they were needed and lucrative for their labour, on the other, the 'social situation' which they had been cornered into (such as poor overcrowded housing) made them socially undesirable (Peach, 1969). As Sivanandan explains in his excellent class analysis of the Black presence in Britain, 'the economic profit from immigration had gone to capital, the social cost had gone to labour, but the resulting conflict between the two had been mediated by a common 'ideology' of racism' (Sivanandan, 1982:105). Despite the obvious signs of racial tension, the 1950s continued to see a general *laissez-faire* approach towards British racism, both from the British government and the police. The reality of widespread racist attacks and poor race relations was generally glossed over in favour of a more liberal and complacent

rationale which assumed that the best was being done in a 'difficult situation', and that these early signs of racism were just a temporary phase.

A more proactive, if misguided, approach to harnessing 'good race relations' began to emerge by the late-1950s and early-1960s, during Britain's looming economic crisis. The spate of anti-immigration legislation between 1958 and 1968, marked a shift towards a sanctioned and 'official racism', so that 'black settlers in Britain watched the racist tail wag the parliamentary dog' (Fryer, 1984:381). The 1960s saw a series of struggles and (often contradictory) state policies on who was and who was not regarded as a British citizen. These included: 1) the Conservative Party's Commonwealth Immigrations Act implemented from 1 November 1961, which placed restrictions on Commonwealth citizen's right of entry to Britain for the first time; 2) Labour's 1965 White Paper on Immigration from the Commonwealth which, with its objective to further tighten annual immigration flows, was seen by some as a deep betrayal; 3) the Race Relations Bill (1965) which, amongst other things, outlawed 'incitement to racial hatred' (under the terms of the act, Michael X[5] (Michael de Freitas), founder of the Malcolm X-inspired Racial Action Adjustment Society which was formed in 1965 following Malcolm X's visit to London, was prosecuted for delivering an 'inflammatory speech against White people'); 4) the subsequent counter-approach in the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Bill which was essentially, a strategy to restrict the entry of Kenyan Asian British passport-holders into Britain (White ex-colonials continued to be granted free-entry under a special clause in the act); and 5) the 1971 Immigration Act which stopped all non-partial (Black) immigration, except for special cases. Thus, despite the theory that Black settlers were equal British citizens (and the inscription of this in the 1965 Race Relations Bill), in real terms, Black people were yet to have equal access in terms of immigration rights, and in relation to

housing, employment and welfare services.[6] In any case, the obsession with numbers and anti

(Black) immigration legislation gave something of a contradictory message to the myth of

equality – it assumed that too many Black settlers were a problem and, more than that, posed

a threat to 'good race relations'. This was a political argument which was commonly used by

both conservative and liberal thinkers (see Chapter 2). In essence, the 'problem of race' was

externalised, rather than being seen as an internal problem within British politics and ideologies

(Hall, 1978). It was, during the 1960s, reduced to matters of policy and generally only

registered when non-English and non-White people were being considered. By the mid-1960s,

the Black presence in Britain had become a less geographically-specific (Notting Hill, over-

populated, urban centres, etc.) and more intense, structured, official and vocalised topic of

political debate, and was increasingly being discussed in terms of 'social problems' and

'numbers', especially in relation to housing, education and employment.[7] It was also by the

mid-1960s, that the wives and children of those from the West Indies and India began to arrive,

so that there was a more obvious sense that Black people were beginning to *settle* in Britain.

(The wives of those men who had emigrated from Pakistan and Bangladesh in the 1950s,

mostly began to join their husbands in the late-1960s and 1970s respectively.)

Meanwhile, the political involvement of Black organisations and groups mainly during the

1960s (but from as early as the 1930s), highlighted how, rather than being passively resistant

to these various exclusionary processes (although there was inevitably a widespread sense of

vulnerability and defensiveness), many Black people were active players in the fight against

British racism. This radical activity took on many forms: 1) by those individual luminaries

who had spearheaded an anti-racist movement since the 1930s. Most notable amongst these,

were key pan-African figures such as Cyril Lionel Robert James,[8] George Padmore, Ras

Makonnen and Jomo Kenyatta, Wallace-Johnson and W.E.B. DuBois, and Asian radicals such

as Udham Singh,[9] Shapurji Saklatvala and V.K. Krishna Menon (Fryer, 1984): 2) through

Black-led organisations such as the International African Service Bureau, the West Indian

Standing Conference, the Pakistani Workers' Association (1961), the Conference of Afro-

Asian-Caribbean Organisations (CAACO) and the Committee Against Racial Discrimination

(CARD) (which formed in 1965, following Martin Luther King's visit, as a British civil rights

coalition between White liberal, Black political groups and anti-racist campaigners, but had

broken up by 1967) (see Solomos, 1989:140-159); and 3) on an individual 'grass roots' level,

often in the form of strikes, by those (often Asian) who had directly faced racism in the

workplace usually in terms of inferior pay and conditions (Rockware Glass, Southall (1965),

Courtauld's Red Scar Mill, Preston (1965), Woolf Rubber Company (1965), Coneygre

Foundry, Tipton (1967)) but also in terms of 'cultural rights' (for Sikhs to wear turbans in the

workplace, for time off for religious festivals, etc) (see Sivanandan, 1982). By the late-1960s,

a more strident and coherent political ideology had begun to develop amongst many Black

people who 'were beginning to fight as a class and as a people' (Sivanandan, 1982:23).[10] The

politics of Black resistance was partially influenced by the awareness of the durability and

extent of British racist processes, but also by the globalisation of (anti-capitalist and anti-

imperialist) protest such as that directed against the Vietnam War and by US Black power

politics (and the impact of Martin Luther King's assassination on 4 April 1968). As these new

forms of Black resistance strengthened, so did the popularity of 'Powellism': a new discourse

of official and popular nationalism which predicted crisis if Black people were not

systematically excluded or recognised as one of the 'Enemies Within' (see Chapter 2). In

February 1967, the National Front was formed out of the League of Empire Loyalists, the

British National Party and sections of the Racial Preservation Society and further whipped up

considerable (mostly working-class) anti-Black sentiment.

It should be noted that a united (African-Caribbean and Asian) conception of 'Blackness' had

not, at this stage, developed in any consistent way. In addition, popular attitudes towards

Black people continued to be based on and circulated around *different* 'moral panics' related to

Asians and African-Caribbeans - each of whom were seen to posses their own set of problems.

Paul Gilroy has described these different racist ideologies:

> The [West Indians] may not be as different or as foreign as Asians who are,
>
> by comparison, handicapped by the strength and resilience of their
>
> culture...Where West Indian culture is weak, Asian communities suffer from a
>
> surfeit of culture which is too strong. (Gilroy, 1983:131)

Asians then, were often seen as overly-traditional, unwilling/unable to integrate, having

'language problems' or as oppressed by their own communities (particularly by men and

members of the older generation, and often in the form of 'arranged marriages'). West Indians,

by contrast, were routinely considered as trouble-makers, reckless, amoral or uncivilised.

However Black Britons were located, it was always in relation to 'Englishness' which was

assumed to be central to 'normal' patterns of behaviour, so that the meaning of 'race' was

always ideological and relational; not based on something intrinsically different between White

and Black.[11] Of course, there *were* important differences between Asians and African-

Caribbeans: many Asians were traditionally rural people and very family-oriented; and West

Indians were, on the whole, from a working-class background and experienced craftsmen

(Sivanandan, 1982:4-5). What they both shared was a strong sense of determination to make

their lives in Britain (even if many of them thought they were only going to stay in Britain for

a short while) as comfortable and successful as possible.

b) The 1970s - 1990s: Becoming "Black-British"

As Hall has identified, the early 1970s saw 'a decisive turn in the whole society into a form of popular authoritarianism' (Hall, 1978:31). With this, the mobilisation of anti-Black sentiment became less specific and sporadic and more extensively inscribed and naturalized in entire attitudes towards 'race' and 'race relations' so that 'Blacks become the bearers, the signifiers, of the crisis of British society in the 70s' (ibid). This crisis, and its accompanying language of racism, worked on many levels and in many different spheres of society, but most obviously in relation to immigration,[12] law and order, and in the moral panics around 'Black crime' ('mugging') (see Chapter 4). 'Race' had become a key political issue and racial discrimination was, as Sivanandan puts it, taken 'out of the market-place' (Sivanandan, 1982:18) and institutionalised. Black-British youth - with their unique experience and hybrid (their parents' and their own, Black and British) cultural insight - were now beginning to lead the struggle against British racism. Black women also played an important role here. For example, Asian women were active on the Grunwick picket line in 1977, in disputes around Child Benefit provisions in the late-1970s, and in response to the 'special adjustment units' which had replaced the ESN (Educationally Sub-Normal) schools of the 1960s (see Sivanandan, 1982).

The early liberal assumption that racism was a relatively harmless, natural and temporary response to the difference of the Black and Asian 'other' and that, in time (once the project of 'integration' was under way), the 'melting pot' would melt increasingly began, by the early-1970s, to be called into question (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992:157-198). Many now recognised that racism was, in fact, socially counter-productive and efforts began to be made to 'administer racism' for the good moral health of the nation. The British 'Race Relations

Industry' as it had been known since around the mid-1960s (the time of the first Race

Relations Bill, the 1968 Race Relations Act, the establishment of the Race Relations Board and

the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants), embarked on various projects to

harness 'good race relations'. These included development, relief and urban aid programmes for

those areas and local authorities seen to be most in need. By the late-1970s, such

'interventions' included race-specific public policies, training initiatives and institutional

directives, and the 'Race Relations Industry' gradually began to work with the US-inspired

ideological principle of 'multiculturalism'; an admission that we are all different, that cultural

and ethnic diversity is a cause for celebration and that minority cultures are an integral part of

British society. To a large extent however, the way in which some of these multicultural

approaches were implemented, did little more (as many 'anti-racists' went on to argue) than

provide a sugary facade (a 'saris, samosas and steel-bands syndrome') (Donald and Rattansi,

1992:2) to a very discriminatory reality. It was further argued that multiculturalism served to

re-emphasise the purity and homogeneity of 'White culture' when not inter-faced with 'multi-

cultures'. The 1970s also saw a continuation of earlier Black struggles to tackle the

marginalisation, exclusion and active racism which many Black people in Britain continued to

face. New public spheres and spaces were identified as playing a crucial role in achieving

equality, and the focus moved increasingly towards examining and challenging the dominant

perspectives of cultural institutions such as the media. 'Black representation' in general, and

television in particular (as the primary medium through which British 'race relations' were

represented), became increasingly identified as an important aspect of Black political struggle

(CARM, CRE, BBC Community Programmes Unit) (see next section and Chapters 3 and 4).

'Getting access' to the media was now recognised as a key bridge to cross in order to achieve

genuine civic equity and change prevailing attitudes towards 'race'. Besides, African-Caribbean

and Asian communities both had a deep-rooted and organic tradition in the arts which many of them now felt was being excluded from the dominant British culture.

The ideology of undiluted Britishness continued to reproduce itself in many facets of political life. In January 1978, the soon-to-be-elected Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, echoed Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 'rivers of blood' speech (see Chapter 2), when she spoke on British television of the threat of being "swamped by people with a different culture".[13] The jingoistic bandwagon which Thatcher invited the 'authentic' members of the British population to jump onto and her appointment as leader of the Conservative Government in 1979, shifted the party increasingly to the Right (a general trend which was mirrored in the US under Reaganism during the 1980s). 1979 also witnessed the Southall riot which followed the National Front's direct provocation of Black people by conducting their racist campaign in a densely-populated Asian area. On 23 April, 1979, 2,756 police (and Special Patrol Groups) turned up to apparently ensure that trouble did not incur from the National Front's public anti-Black campaign (5,000 people had turned up the previous day to protest against the fact that the NF had been granted a public space (Ealing Town Hall) to state their case) (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism/Southall Rights, 1981). In fact, many of the anti-Nazi demonstrators were dealt with violently by the police, and Blair Peach, a teacher, was killed. In the same year, the policy-oriented Institute of Race Relations (through which A. Sivanandan launched *Race and Class*) submitted *Police against Black People,* a report to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure which documented police harassment of Black people (in their meeting-places, at the 1976 Notting Hill carnival, at black events and so on), and concluded that the police, rather than reinforcing morality, 're-create it - through stereotyping the black section of society as muggers and criminals and illegal immigrants' (IRR, 1979).

The 1980s can, for a number of reasons, be identified as a 'critical decade' in this history (Bailey and Hall, 1992:7). During the early part of the 1980s, the public debate about race relations opened up, and unprecedented degrees of pressure began to be placed on state institutions to alleviate racial discrimination and 'disadvantage'. This was most intensely articulated and triggered by those (Black and White people) involved in the civil uprisings in Britain's urban centres during 1980 (St. Paul's, Bristol) and 1981 (Brixton, Southall, Toxteth and most major cities).[14] These rebellions followed a series of frustrations which pointed, amongst other things, to the limitations of a liberal multicultural consensus which, in real terms, appeared to be doing very little to eradicate extensive racial inequality. A series of events during 1981 foregrounded the discontent which many were feeling about the ways in which Black Britons were being administered, marginalised or ignored in social and political life. These included: the New Cross (Deptford) fire attack in January in which thirteen Black teenagers died - and the subsequent indifference with which the case was dealt with (both by the police and the media); the Black People's Day of Action (or the 'New Cross March') organised by the Race Today Collective[15] on 2 March (approximately 15,000 of whom were Black); and the intensive programmes for policing introduced in Lambeth in early April (see Mercer, 1994:6-9, and Fryer, 1984:398). This last 'initiative', 'Operation Swamp 1981' (as part of the London-wide exercise, 'Operation Star'), encouraged a 'stop and search' operation (out of 943 stopped and searched in Brixton, only 75 were charged). These can be identified as the key episodes leading up to the uprisings which were to follow later that year.[16]

As Kobena Mercer observes, these moments revealed an important shift in the way in which 'race relations' in Britain was coming to be understood. He says, 'What was going on was not

only conflict on the streets of civil society, but a struggle over the way in which events were

understood and interpreted. What was a "riot" in one discourse, was a "rebellion" in another'

(Mercer, 1994:7). This shift also highlighted, on the one hand, a 'dissensus' (Mercer, 1994:54)

in any one attitude towards British 'race relations' and on the other, it acted as a unifying

moment between different non-White ethnic communities. Many Black people now began to

identify 'inferential' as well as 'overt' racism (see Hall, 1981) and realise that discriminatory

practice was not something which only occurred in state institutions (police, government, law,

education), but also within welfare services (health, social-work, adoption) and the arts. The

ways in which some multicultural directives (particularly in relation to education) were

implemented also came under severe criticism.[17] The emphasis shifted increasingly towards

strategies of 'anti-racism' (positive action, ethnic monitoring, contract compliance) which were

now generally considered as a tougher and more direct intervention than 'multiculturalism'.

Here, the role of radical local authorities such as the Greater London Council (with increased

spending to be directed at 'race relations matters' following the riots), were important for the

ways in which they actively initiated equal opportunity, anti-racist and 'popular planning'

strategies, which related to nearly all sectors of community life, including education and the

social services. The GLC, with its Ethnic Minority Arts Committee, also provided an

important source of funding for the Black arts sector (see Chapter 9).[18] Many of these

interventions now began to take place on the 'inside' of institutions which had been influenced

by the discourse of anti-racism and in those spaces where the left could foreground issues of

racial (gender and sexual) equality (most notably local government, university campuses, the

arts subsidised sector).[19] An increasing number of Black people began to move into public

administration, trade unions, business and local government, and many of them were employed

as 'race advisors'. In the 1987 General Election, four Black (Labour Party) Members of

Parliament (Keith Vaz, Diane Abbott, Bernie Grant, Paul Boateng) were elected to the House

of Commons.

The politically stifling atmosphere prior to the 1980s had acted as a catalyst, not only in terms

of the 'riots', but also in activating creativity and a strong desire to express and find a cohesive

voice. Echoing the US Black Power movement of the 1960s, many Asian, African and

Caribbean people in Britain, had begun to use the collective term 'Black' as a 'working',

political umbrella term. The significance of collective (cultural and political) practice was

realised in the emergence of 'political Blackness'. This organisational category came into usage

not only to trample on a history of negation and marginalisation, but also to find a unified

voice in order to fight collectively for political rights and better representation. It was the

shared experiences of both colonialism, racism and, for many, a post-migration history which

encouraged the redefinition. 'Blackness' was, in Mercer's words, 'de-biologized' (Mercer

1992:430). The rearticulation of Black-British identity,

> ...showed that identities are not found but *made;* that they are not just there,
>
> waiting to be discovered in a vocabulary of Nature, but that they have to be
>
> culturally and politically *constructed* through political antagonism and
>
> cultural struggle. (Mercer in Grossberg et al, 1992:427)

The widespread subscription to the term 'Black-British' also partly arose from the

dissatisfaction with the labels 'immigrant', 'ethnic minorities', and 'multiculturalism'

(described by Salman Rushdie as the 'new catchword', Rushdie, 1991:137). For some

however, 'Black' was essentially an imposed identity which was not culturally specific enough

(this was a complaint mostly registered by Asians[20]) and more than that, only necessary

because of the ways in which 'Whiteness' functioned in British society. This was true insofar

as African-Caribbeans and Asians in Britain essentially became 'Black' as a result of their political and cultural marginalisation (or as film-maker Ian Rashid said in relation to the term 'South Asian', "We do require it - if for no other reason than as an antidote for "Paki"" (Ghani and Rashid, 1994)). Prior to that and in different contexts, those who lived elsewhere could express their ethnic identities in other ways. Nevertheless, the term 'Black' was extensively claimed and, in many ways, helped to develop new and strong forms of identification between different ethnic communities - although it did not, in itself, mark the 'substitution of one kind of politics for another' (Hall in Mercer, 1988:27). Towards the end of the decade, many also began to use the term 'Black and Asian', signalling, to some extent, a general fragmentation of the term 'Black' into more specific and 'pure' categorical ethnicities.[21]

It is important to note that the political events of the 1980s also brought about an insistence, by many Black people, that they also needed to be considered as British. As Hall noted in 'New Ethnicities', a paper written in the late-1980s, 'Fifteen years ago, we didn't care...whether there was any black in the Union Jack. Now not only do we care, we *must'* (Hall in Mercer, 1988:30). By the end of the decade, a number of material changes (such as funding cuts for local authorities and the abolition of the GLC in 1986) and a general assumption that a lot had already been done in the name of 'good race relations', marked a further extensive shift in the 'Race Relations industry' from collective and politically-motivated organisations to ones based more on individualism and culture (often with a religious emphasis) (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). And indeed, in general, by the late-1980s British 'race relations' had, in many senses, improved: there were signs of greater integration between Black and White Britons; there were more Black figures in strategic, political positions; the impact of Thatcher's entrepreneurial success culture meant that some Black people were doing exceptionally well,

and some ethnic groups (most notably the Chinese and East-African Asians) were thriving on the economic front; and, in general, there was a heightened awareness about the differences between and needs of Britain's various ethnic communities. At the same time, racism persisted and equality of opportunity - although inscribed in various policies - was still not a reality for many Black Britons who remained disadvantaged in respect to education, the judicial system, immigration, housing, etc.

Some argued that 'official' liberalism in the form of top-down, institutionalised anti-racist strategies, had brought its own sets of problems such as an extreme (and often misfired) orthodoxy, tokenism, ethnic absolutism, lip-service and, most of all, the general assumption that racism is only something which exists on the margins of British life (see Gilroy in Donald and Rattansi, 1992:49-61, and Gilroy in Phillips and Phillips, 1998:375-6). Alongside this, the effects of popular mythologies around 'political correctness' (for example, banning 'Baa Baa Black Sheep', milk in coffee and golliwogs), settled in such a way as to undermine the serious work which was being done around issues of equality - making way for 'anti-anti-racism', or the 'PC backlash' (Dunant, 1994). The new 'anti-racist, anti-sexist' climate of cultural sensitivity which had begun to make itself known since the early-1980s, was now being routinely lamented (albeit mockingly) for 'hijacking' a more honest and forgiving era and for 'driving racism underground'. Liberal thought, in its PC incarnation, whilst not without its problems, was systematically trivialised and undermined, while itself having largely been invented by those of the Right. Now it was those who supported anti-racist campaigns rather than those who were opposed or indifferent to them, who were widely being seen as the ones 'stirring up' racial tension and ultimately obstructing Britain's 'right' to be Great again. Complaints about 'quotas', 'special treatment' and 'the new conformism' began in many areas

(and most notably in the press) to provide a substitute for cogent critical analysis about the politics of 'race' and community.

The effects of this shift continue today, and moral and ethical dilemmas are still recurrently dismissed as the work of the 'thought-police' - not only predictably by the Right, but also by the wavering left (see Chapter 10). From the vantage point of the late-1990s, it is useful to note some more recent changes which have raised further pertinent questions about the state and status of Black Britain.[22] One we can relate to the resurgence of new forms of violent racism and neo-nationalism across Europe (Harris, 1990). The alterations in European nation-states (economical, geographical, political) since the 1980s, and the new processes of globalisation, have not necessarily encouraged a demise in ideas of nationhood and nationalism, but been widely experienced as moments of crisis out of which reaffirmations of belonging and exclusion need to be reasserted. As Mercer notes, 'Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty' (Mercer in Rutherford, 1990:43). (See Section 2 for a continuation of this discussion in relation to cultural practice and theory.) With some of these nationalisms, the racist emphasis has largely shifted from racial inferiority to the threat which new hyphenated identities ('Black-British', 'Anglo-Asian' etc.) are seen to pose to a 'pure' and 'coherent' sense of national cohesion (amongst the older hyphenated identity, 'Anglo-Saxon'); thus recalling the Powellite agenda of the late-1960s/early-1970s. But, as Nancy Murray from the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism suggests, what is distinctive about these contemporary forms of racism, is that they have come *after* the breakthroughs of the 1980s and, as such, the emphasis is on, 'rolling back the gains of anti-racism in the name of traditional freedoms, national pride and the liberation of the white majority' (Murray, 1989:2).

The recent structural mutations in European nation-states (such as the development of the single market within the European Community, alterations in border controls, a more cohesive sense of 'European law', the continuation of migration into Europe) have, for some, been a clarifying process in determining how identity can or needs to be deciphered.[23] Many have expressed concern about a new pan-European state authoritarianism or what Sivanandan has called a 'Fortress Europe' (Sivanandan in *Race and Class* special issue 'Europe: variations on a theme of racism', 1991), which will continue and extend prejudice and racism towards Black ethnic minorities. Specifically in Britain, there has been a renewed drive towards reclaiming an 'untouched' and exclusive sense of 'Englishness', despite and perhaps because of, the increasingly 'multi-ethnic' and 'multi-religious' actuality of Britain, and the move towards 'becoming European'.[24] We have, in recent years, seen a rise in the number of violent racist attacks in Britain and across Europe[25] (*The Guardian*, 26.4.91:2 and 13.4.90) and a return to the rhetoric of anti-immigration (in the name of 'good race relations'), now specifically applied to political refugees and asylum seekers (for example, the Czech Roma and Kosovan ones arriving at Dover in 1997). The unprovoked racist murder of the Black-British teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in 1993 and the way in which his case was subsequently handled by the 'official agencies' has, for many Black Britons, been a disturbing sign that racism is alive and well in British society.

Within a broader context, the building of anti-racist strategies has arguably become increasingly difficult in a Europe where 'anti-Black', has dominantly been replaced by the more ambiguous 'pro-nation', and where new forms of racism have taken on increasingly cultural and religious tones rather than crude biological ones, forming what Martin Barker has called 'the new

racism' (Barker, 1982).[26] This new mode centralises the 'imaginary definition of the nation as a unified, *cultural* community. It defends and constructs an image of national-culture, homogeneous in its whiteness yet precarious and perpetually vulnerable to attack from enemies within and without' (Gilroy, 1987:50). This has most obviously been seen in new forms of religious prejudice which have, in the 1990s, become the dominant form of racial prejudice. If we briefly take the case of British-Muslims as an example, we can see that the 1990s cultural context of Islamaphobia has moved away from crude biological essentialism towards seemingly more rational (cultural, religious) explanations of difference. A number of events have served to foreground debates around Islamic and British-Muslim identity: the resignation of White headmaster Ray Honeyford following his comments on multicultural education and Muslims (1983) and the whole question about culturally and religiously independent schools; the 'book-burning' of Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses (1989); the Gulf War (1991); Jemima Goldsmith's marriage to Imran Khan (1996); the outrage over the prospective 'beheading' of two British nurses in Saudi Arabia (1997); and of course, the tragic deaths of Princess Diana and Dodi Al Fayed on 31 August, 1997 (see Chapter 3 for a discussion about 'Islamaphobia'). Through these and other events, we have seen the outpourings of negative and limited attitudes towards British-Muslims, and towards alternative lifestyles and religious practices in general.

Of course, the 1990s 'experience of doubt and uncertainty' works on more than one front. For some, it is being understood and lived not as a fixed distinction between 'national ' and 'foreigner', 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'continental', 'British' and 'Black' - but as a more fluid and complex way of being. Thus, another effect of reconceptualisations of the modern nation-state (see Miles, 1993:194-216), while it too relates to struggles around European nationhood, is

being articulated by those traditionally assumed to be on the outside - or marginal to it. The

notion of any single version of 'Britishness' for example, is being re-examined, re-made and

mythified by the non-English. This reevaluation is emerging in remarkably disparate ways: it is

sometimes about aspiring towards nationhood, but sometimes also about reacting against or

finding no place in it. Indeed, many have expressed the limitations of a national or nationalistic

perspective itself in a rapidly changing Europe. As Paul Gilroy argues, Black Britons have, in

the 1990s, created, 'a topography of loyalty and identity in which the structures and

presuppositions of the nation-state have been left behind because they are seen to be

outmoded' (Gilroy in Grossberg et al, 1992:193). The act of asserting diasporic difference has

manifested itself in the formation of new styles and forms of cultural production, and most

obviously in the process of 'hybridisation'. Through a range of diasporic strategies,

particularly those developed by the young, culturally hybrid, the notion of 'ethnic minorities'

has found a replacement in the term and concept of 'Black-British'. And the emphasis within

these tactics has continued to shift from 'otherness' to 'difference' (Pines in Pines and

Willemen, 1989:viii). Referring to the earlier set of strategies, Cornel West has argued that they

were designed to,

> show that Black people were like White people thereby eliding differences (in
>
> history, culture) between Whites and Blacks. Black specificity and
>
> particularity was thus banished in order to gain White acceptance and
>
> approval...these Black responses rested upon the HOMOGENIZING
>
> IMPULSE that assumed that all Black people were really alike - hence
>
> obliterating differences (class, gender, region, sexual orientation) between
>
> Black peoples. (West, 1990:27)

These new cultures have dominantly moved on from the political impetus of previous cultural

structures. The overbearing thrust of the assimilationist projects leading up to the 1980s,

which attempted to dilute aspects of difference within and between ethnicities, and homogenise 'Black' and 'White' in order to promote equality, have been overtaken by a recognition of the extent to which social and cultural identities exist in varied and complex ways (West, 1990:27).

There is an obvious paradox which some of these struggles around difference and nationhood highlight; that the precise 'national' circumstances of Britain's post-war years are what gave rise to many of these new ways of 'representing Blackness' and 'the nation'. As Bailey and Hall note in relation to the new cultural strategies, 'One day the world is going to wake up and discover that whole areas of life in Britain, in spite of Conservatism and Little Englandism, have been transformed. A kind of hybridization is happening to the English, whether they like it or not' (Bailey and Hall, 1992:7). The concepts of 'translation' (Bhabha, 1990, Rushdie, 1991) and 'tradition' (Robins, 1991) are particularly useful here, in understanding that different diasporic people and the 'cultures of hybridity' (Hall, 1992:308) are developing in unique ways. As Robins argued:

> The continuity and historicity of identity are challenged by the immediacy
> and intensity of global cultural confrontations. The comforts of Tradition are
> fundamentally challenged by the imperative to forge a new self-interpretation
> based upon the responsibilities of cultural Translation. (Robins, 1991:41)

This 'pull' between 'translation' and 'tradition' has been recognised as contradictory impulses within the formulation of new identities: those which 're-identify' with places and 'cultures of origin'; those which produce symbolic forms of cultural identification; those which have developed 'counter-ethnicities'; those which have revived traditionalism, or cultural and religious orthodoxy, or political separatism, and so on (Hall, 1992:308). These seemingly-

incongruous tactics - of different Black people both claiming and eschewing the importance of

'being British' - can however, all be attributed to the different and fragmented ways in which

nationalisms, nation-states and hybridities can themselves be articulated.

Section 2: Critical Approaches to Reading Race on Television

So far, I have been tracing what I identify as some of the major turning points and continuities

in Black-British social and political history. In this section, I want to outline some of the

primary ways in which critical and cultural evaluations of these moments have developed, in

specific relation to the question of Black representation on television. (Of course, not all

studies of British 'race relations' have addressed the question of media representation and very

few have specifically examined British television's treatment of 'race'.) Research on race and

representation can generally be split into three areas: one, as part of more general debates about

identity, ethnicity, culture and representation (Gilroy, 1993a, Gilroy 1993b Mercer, 1994,

much of Hall's work,[27] hooks, 1992, Dyer, 1993); two, work which focuses on representations

of race in British film and cinema (Pines and Willemen, 1989, Mercer, 1988, Malik, 1996,

Young, 1996); and three, work which looks specifically at the British (Twitchin, 1988, Daniels

and Gerson, 1989, Pines, 1992) or European television context (Frachon and Vargaftig, 1995).

There are other studies which have looked at film and television in Britain (Givanni, 1995,

Bourne, 1998),[28] those which have covered both Britain and America (Ross, 1996), and those

which have commented on ethnic minorities and the media in general (Alibhai-Brown in

Blackstone et al, 1998). Of course, there are more general debates about audiences,

spectatorship, public service broadcasting, access and globalisation/localisation which are of

relevance in studies of race and representation, as are those studies on Black representation

which do not refer specifically to British television - particularly those on American cinema

(Pines, 1975, Bogle, 1991, Cripps, 1993, Diawara, 1993). There have also been a number of

industry-commissioned reports on the relationship between ethnic minorities and the media,

which have tended to not be based on textual analysis. Instead, they have tended to focus on

questions of policy (codes and guidelines), employment (patterns and monitoring), audience

(habits, tastes and demands) and the domestic context (ownership, reception trends within a

household). These reports have generally adopted an empirical, quantitative approach (e.g.

hours of Black programmes, number of key Black characters in a programme, etc.)

(Cumberbatch and Woods for the BBC and ITC, 1996, Halloran et al for Channel 4, 1996).[29]

The Commission for Racial Equality has commissioned studies into race and the media which

have also generally followed an empirical approach (Troyna, 1981, Anwar and Shang, 1982,

CRE, 1996). As I will go on to argue, within this diverse range of theoretical and

methodological approaches, a number of different arguments, views and positions on Black

representation have emerged.

In terms of those studies of Black representation on television, I would suggest that there

remain two significant absences. The first, relates to questions of sexuality and gender which

still remain limited, underdeveloped and de-emphasised in general accounts and debates around

race and representation (see Young, 1996). A second problem exists: many of these studies,

while they often criticise the 'narrow-casting' and strategies of absence and exclusion in

delineations of Black people on-screen, themselves appear to be selective or vague in their

focus of research. I am thinking here about the most obvious absence, concealed under the

supposedly all-encompassing term 'Black', of failing to consider in any substantial way, how

South Asian people have been represented.[30]

a) Representation and Meaning

How we are seen determines in part how we are treated;

how we treat others is based on how we see them;

such seeing comes from representation. (Dyer, 1993:1)

At this stage, it is important that we address the term 'representation' and consider the

different meanings it can occupy. The term 'representation' can be used in two main senses.

The first relates to representing/speaking for someone/thing, thus playing a symbolic

interpretative role by expressing some*one's* viewpoint from some*where*. Here, there is an

assumption that someone else can 'fill the place of' or substitute that experience for the sole

purpose of 'representing' it. This type of representation is about acting as the embodiment of

someone/thing and about standing for/corresponding to that (e.g. someone/thing claiming to

represent or stand for 'the Black community'). Here, someone/thing is being represented

through/by someone/thing. This entails the belief that someone/thing is 'representable'. The

second possible use of the term 'representation', is to refer to the process by which an

image/impression of something or someone is reproduced. Here, 'representing' is essentially

about portrayal and description through language (oral, visual, still, moving); it is an

expressive, communicative process. In both these senses of the term, signs and symbols are

used to convey meaning, often to represent or stand for some aspect of an 'external' reality. In

a lot of media and cultural analysis however, there is a widespread agreement that far from

simply reflecting or presenting 'reality', the work of representation does, in fact, (at least

partially) construct 'reality' and, more than that, serves an important role in how social

relations develop and in how ideologies[31] are constructed. I refer to 'ideologies' here because

they can be understood as 'sets of ideas and values' and opposed to any singular notion of an essential truth or fixed reality (Foucault, 1980:118). Recently, the term 'discourse' has become increasingly widespread in discussions around 'ideology', to refer to the textual process by which meanings are constructed. Discourse analysis stresses that there are no pre-given ideologies which are adopted and then simply represented, but that ideologies themselves are formed through discourse. Michel Foucault's work is particularly useful here in its emphasis on discourse serving not the 'will to truth', but the 'will to power' (Foucault, 1982). Foucault was less interested in 'the great model of language and signs' than in 'that of war and battle'; more concerned with the 'relations of power, not relations of meaning' (Foucault, 1980:114-5).

The work of linguistics (the scientific study of language) and semiology (the study of signs and meaning) also plays an important part in the study of representational practices. Just as the discursive approach emphasises the effects and manifestations of representation (its 'politics'), the semiological approach interrogates how language produces meaning (its 'poetics') (Hall, 1997). It is useful to call upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to make a brief comment about one of the ways in which television representation, for example, works. In broad terms, this approach suggests that who speaks and who is spoken of are never identical. The positioning of the 'I' subject and the discourses (the mode, form or genre of language) within which they stand (the symbolic) are always therefore 'placed', and serve to structure identity. The process of representation and 'televisualisation' constructs its own relationship with the enunciator and the enunciated. It could be argued then that traditional 'unaccessed voices' are commonly located as the subjects of articulation (the enunciated) with television itself as the subject in articulation (the enunciator). As such, the dialogic transaction between the enunciator and enunciated is, in this case, arguably adjudicated by the medium. Television

then, can play an important role in determining the exchange between speaker and addressee

and, like other systems of representation, can guide the audience towards a 'preferred reading'

(Hall, 1973) which often corresponds to the dominant social, cultural and political values of a

particular time or context. Moreover, as Troyna argues in relation to journalism in general, 'to a

greater degree than any other profession or institution, it controls the debate about itself'

(Troyna, 1981:8).

But meanings (and myths), as well as being constructed through what is being represented and

by whom (the sender), are also mediated through the audience or 'reader'. As such, a third

'subject-position' is at work; that of the 'overhearing audience'. 'Significations', as Van Loon

puts it, 'can only become myths if they are mediated by and anchored in the historicity of this

third party' (Van Loon, 1995). As John Fiske says, 'A reader is constituted by his socio-

cultural experience and thus he is the channel through which message and culture interact. That

is meaning' (Fiske, 1982). Meaning then, is produced both through our conceptual systems

and through the things around us (people, objects, events) (Hall, 1997:15-64). As such, no

representation, in itself, is meaningless; all representations mean something - although never

just one thing. Since meanings and ideologies are never fixed, they can also be re-worked and re-

negotiated. But whilst we are all integral to how meanings and understandings are constructed,

each of us are located differently in relation to power and knowledge, and thus hold different

degrees and sorts of power in relation to cultural production.

These various issues and theoretical approaches around the question of meaning and

representation, can help us to understand television as a principal signifying system in

contemporary society, which actively and continuously depends on the representational

process. In this system of representation, the language of television (its symbols and signs) is

made to convey certain meanings. 'Televisualisation', in itself, is a process concerned with the

mobilisation of logos, symbols and signs (which it sometimes formulates itself) and as such, is

a movement from *signification* to *representation*. The study of representations of race

therefore needs to consider television as part of a 'machinery of representation' (Hall in Curran

et al, 1986) which produces and circulates a number of different (and often competing)

ideologies. The ideologies which I am particularly concerned with here, are those which

underpin how racial identities are constructed within television representation. Rather than

embarking on any detailed review of these various discussions around language, ideology and

discourse, I am interested in their overall emphasis on aspects of *process* and *power* as

playing an integral part in how meaning, difference, identity and subjectivity are formed to

produce a 'racialized regime of representation' (Hall, 1997:245). Briggs and Cobley neatly

summarise the 'raw ingredients' needed to develop a discourse around 'race' (Briggs and

Cobley, 1998:281):

> 1) the person's own 'racial' identity (e.g. 'White')
>
> 2) other 'racial' identities to which that person's 'racial' identity can be
> opposed in a power relationship (e.g. 'Black' Vs. 'White')
>
> 3) a discourse that asserts the centrality of race as a defining feature of a
> person's identity (e.g. racism)
>
> 4) other (non-'racial') identities to which that person's 'racial' identity can
> be opposed/complemented in a power relationship (e.g. 'race' may be
> outweighed by 'gender').

b) Analysing Race on Television

(i) Developments in Audience Studies

Studying race and the media is a relatively recent phenomenon. It began as part of

'complementary studies' in the 1960s (a precursor to the Sociology of Mass Communications

and Cultural Studies of today). Up to this point, the 'hypodermic' theory of media effects had

been especially influential in mass society and media studies research. This approach

(progressed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and others at the Frankfurt School of

Social Research during the 1930s), drew a direct connection between audiences and the mass

media, to suggest that audiences were directly affected (or 'injected') by media images and

information in an unmediated way. In this sense, the emphasis was less on an active 'reader' of

the media's messages (as in semiology), as on a passive 'receiver' of media images. The

pessimism and simplicity of this theory came under some criticism during the 1950s and

1960s, particularly in the work of the Leicester Centre for Mass Communications Research

during the 1960s.[32] By the 1970s, a new approach to media audience studies had emerged - an

active-audience thesis - which shifted the emphasis from what the media 'do' with audiences,

to what audiences 'do' with media images (Halloran, 1970). Although this new critical

approach was important for film and media studies in general, it was also relevant for the

newly emerging theories around race, ethnicity and the media, because it identified that each

reader/viewer was able to actively decode and interpret meaning in different ways. It turn,

some also recognised that our social relations help us to structure understanding (Morley and

Brunsdon, 1978).

Stuart Hall's model of 'encoding/decoding' (Hall, 1973) was particularly useful in giving this

new audience studies approach a more 'workable' sociological and cultural perspective, making

it possible to relate to the ways in which various media texts and readings can be encoded and

decoded. While Hall agreed (like the effects theorists) that the media does have the power to

set agendas and cultural frameworks, he also stressed that viewers themselves are active and

decode messages in different ways (often different from the ways in which the original message is itself encoded). As such, he argued that there can be more than one reading from the same message although television can inscribe a 'preferred reading' (see also Hall in Cohen and Young, 1973). In essence, Hall stressed that there is a lack of transparency between the ways in which messages are encoded and decoded and that the media operates according to an open, not closed message system.

During the 1970s, 'Cultural Studies' (which originally focused heavily on questions of class and, to a certain extent, gender), was to become the primary area for studies of race and representation. The work of three specific media research centres during the 1970s and 1980s was to prove particularly influential in studies of race and television. The first, was the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham,[33] which developed the issue of 'agenda setting' (of how the media establish and order a particular set of issues) especially in relation to news and documentary reports on race. One particularly important study to come out of the centre was The Empire Strikes Back (CCCS, 1982), a study of Black-British race relations in which a certain amount of attention was paid to questions of cultural representation. The second important academy was the Leicester Centre for Mass Communications Research. Focusing specifically on the mass media and racial conflict, Hartmann and Husband found that, although direct effects on media audiences were unlikely, news reports kept within a British cultural tradition (e.g. derogatory to foreigners) and, as such, it was argued that they worked within an established cultural framework. Hartmann and Husband concluded that the conceptions of Black people in the media were 'more conducive to the development of hostility towards them than acceptance' (Hartmann and Husband, 1974:208). The third centre, was the Glasgow University Media Group with their work on

news. Through content analysis, they combined elements of the manipulative theory and

hegemonic theory to critique the ways in which television news is constructed (GUMG, 1976,

1980, 1982, 1985). Although their work focused on specific cases such as the Miners' Strike,

the Falklands War and organised labour, their basic argument was that news tends to focus on

effects rather than causes, and that news is neither neutral nor natural. They argued that

television news actively manufactures representations, often under the guise of impartiality.

This, in turn, was important for understanding how news representations of race could be

selective, biased and condensed. Although most work around race and representation at this

time tended to focus on actuality programming, there was some research into how race tended

to be depicted in more general ways. The most notable of these, perhaps, was Stuart Hall's

seminal paper 'The Whites of their Eyes' (1981). In this, Hall identified what he called

'television's basic grammar of race' (Hall, 1981:39) which, he argued, consisted of three types:

the slave-figure, the native and the entertainer. At around this time (late-1970s/ early-1980s),

there were also a number of public oppositional campaigns mounted around questions of

access and the media's mis/under-representation of ethnic minorities (Campaign Against

Racism in the Media, the CRE, the Black Media Workers Association) (see Chapters 3 and 4).

One critical approach which began to be used in some audience studies of race and

representation, was psychoanalysis. During the 1970s, Freudian and Lacanian accounts of

identification and subjectivity became increasingly central to feminist studies, film theory and

to film journals such as *Screen*. The psychoanalytic approach was, generally speaking, less

readily applied to studies of television, which tended to be understood through more

'grounded' modes of analysis such as effects studies, social readings and textual analysis.[34] In

addition, a lot of feminist psychoanalytic screen theory (such as Laura Mulvey's seminal

'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in the 1975 edition of *Screen*), was criticised for

ignoring questions of race, for failing to consider racial distinctions *between* spectators, and for

disregarding that looking relations are racially (as well as gender) constructed (see Chapter 7).[35]

Nevertheless, the basic psychoanalytic framework proved useful when considering the

complicated relationship between texts and audiences and the 'politics of the look'. The

various works of Frantz Fanon (1952/1986), Homi Bhabha (1983), Sander L Gilman (1985),

Joel Kovel (1988) and Kobena Mercer (1994) have been important for considering the racial

aspects of identity and looking relations through the use of psychoanalysis.[36]

(ii) Stereotypes, Positive and Negative Images

One of the most common ways in which representations of race began to be discussed in the

1970s and early-1980s, was in relation to stereotyping and positive/negative images. Since the

1960s, the sociological term 'stereotype' had been widely used to refer to the representational

practice by which a given social experience, person, style, etc. is simplified so as to produce a

reductive image/impression. Stereotypes became increasingly central to debates around race

and representation and were criticised for being crude simplifications which select, reduce and

essentialise the definition of a type of person, style, event or institution. Many of those who

were critical of the media's representations of Black people also began to call for 'positive

images' in order to balance out the 'negative images' which were often used to depict Black

people and their experiences. The emphasis therefore, was on changing the 'relations of

representation' (Hall in Mercer, 1988:27).

Although it was important to identify the media's widespread dependence on the use of

stereotypes in its depiction of Black people, there was a point in the 1980s, when debates

around stereotypes and requests to replace 'negative images' with 'positive' ones became a

limiting and standardised way of discussing the quite complex issue of race and representation

(see debates around **My Beautiful Laundrette** in Chapter 9). [37] Important as they were,

there was, in fact, an inherent contradiction in many of these arguments: on the one hand, there

was a general acknowledgement that 'representation' and 'reality' were two distinct entities;

and on the other, there was a demand that representations of Black people were drawn in more

'accurate' ways. Thus, pronouncements of 'misrepresentation' were readily applied by those

who also recognised that film and television do not simply reflect reality, but construct a

reality of their own (see for example, Stam and Spence, 1985:637). Moreover, many wanted to

see more 'realistic' depictions of Black people, whilst also resenting the supposition that there

was any one 'real' Black experience that could be represented (see Chapters 8 and 9 for some

of these debates in reference to specific texts). There was also a general assumption that all

stereotypes are negative, and thus by simply eliminating them, representations of race would

become more 'balanced' (see Chapter 10). Of course, 'positive images' can also be

stereotypes, and stereotypes can, in fact, be reproduced as forms of resistance (see Neale,

1979-80:33-37, and Bhabha 1983:18-36). So while I would agree that it can be useful to

acknowledge the contexts, processes and interests that stereotypes might serve, I would also

suggest that leaning too heavily on the 'stereotypes/positive and negative image' rhetoric can

be limiting for three main reasons: in the first place, 'typing' has to be recognised as an

inevitable and necessary system of representation; in the second, there can be no absolute

agreement as to what 'positive' and 'negative' definitively constitute (can the image of a gold-

medal winning Black sportsman *only* be considered as 'positive'?); and in the third, the validity

of 'positive' and 'negative' as racial categories of representation themselves need to be

questioned since they do little to displace the assumptions on which the original stereotypes

are based (see Malik, 1996:208-9).

It is nonetheless important (since stereotypes are the primary device through which

representations of race circulate in media texts), to make some comment about the ways in

which stereotypes function as a representational practice. Stereotypes are short-hand; they are

palatable because they help us to decode people (see Malik, 1998:310-311). Although they

serve to simplify the world and its subjects, they are dependent on quite complex processes

(see Chapter 10). They enable the reader to associate one aspect of a stereotype with many

other things; creating a complex web of beliefs from a seemingly glib categorisation. They are,

as such, distinct from 'social types' or archetypes' which are necessary modes used in all

aspects of visual communication (film, photography, etc.) through which we interpret the

world and produce knowledge (Dyer, 1977). Hence, a representation of the 'inassimilable

Asian immigrant' or the 'Black mugger' tells us more than just that; our stream of

consciousness builds on the basic information (issues of language, cultural values, social

background etc. automatically follow) to create a quite detailed (though not necessarily

accurate) profile of what that person constitutes. T. E Perkins offers a useful example here:

> to refer 'correctly' to someone as a 'dumb blonde', and to understand what is
>
> meant by that, implies a great deal more than hair colour and intelligence. It
>
> refers immediately to her sex, which refers to her status in society, her
>
> relationship to men, her inability to behave or think rationally, and so on. In
>
> short, it implies knowledge of a complex social structure. (Perkins,
>
> 1979:139)

We often find it easier to blame/focus on the stereotypes which serve to represent ourselves

and others, than to focus on why, how, when and by whom they are produced. Stereotypes

are social constructs designed *to* socially construct. They do not simply come into being from nothing and they are not 'used' in the same way by everyone. The way in which we apply stereotypes in cultural production is as revealing as which stereotypes we select to represent. Stereotypes in themselves, are not necessarily offensive, negative or harmful, but the interests they can serve and the contexts in which they *can* be used have the potential to be precisely that (see Dyer, 1993:11-18). Perhaps then, one of the most important questions we can ask in relation to stereotypes, is *who* has the power to yield and circulate stereotypes in cultural production? But we also need to identify which are the most used stereotypes, when and where they become most visible and question whose interest they serve?

(iii) Diaspora, Hybridity and the 'New Ethnicities'

> Now one of the chief errors of thought is to continue to think in one set of
>
> forms, categories, ideas etc., when the object, the content, has moved on, has
>
> created or laid premises for an extension, a development of thought. (C.L.R.
>
> James, 1981:15)

One effect of the standardised 'stereotypes, positive/negative' debates, was to signal the urgency for discussing race and representation in new and more complicated ways (see Mercer in Daniels and Gerson, 1989:1-11). By the mid to late-1980s, a series of debates began to emerge which pointed to the limitations of discussing race and representation within dualist ('right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad', 'positive' or 'negative') terms, and began to focus on how a multiplicity of views, both of and from Black people, could be transmitted via the media.[38] This shift marked a move from challenging stereotypes themselves as 'wrong' or 'negative' (which itself was a position which retained some sense that there was a 'right' or 'positive' way of categorising Blackness), to a position which questioned that there are any definite

(racial) categories to represent at all. Thus, it began to be argued that rather than Black simply

being good or positive (as in the 1960s Black Power slogan 'Black is Beautiful'), 'Blackness'

was in fact something which could not be defined in any simple or singular way. Of course,

this also involved accepting that not all Black films are good, not all 'realistic representations'

are positive, not all Black artists are non-sexist, non-racist etc., and that Black

audiences/critics/producers themselves had to move away from a Black=good/White=bad

orthodoxy (see Williamson in Mercer, 1988, Mercer in Rutherford, 1990:43-71, Hall in

Mercer, 1988).

The essence of this 'cultural turn' was described by Hall in his paper 'New Ethnicities'

(delivered at the 1988 'Black Film, British Cinema' Conference at London's ICA), as

representing the 'end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' (Hall in Mercer,

1988:28); marking both a new liberatory position from which the Black artist could speak and

a more diverse expectation of 'Black representation' itself. Of course, this 'development of

thought' (theory) was complimented by, and a response to, the ways in which Black

representation itself was being addressed and articulated in new forms of Black cultural

practice. Central to this increasing symbiosis between theory and practice, was a more fluid

conception of identity - not as something passed down from one generation to the next or from

one Black person to another - but as an indeterminate. dynamic and contingent disposition. As

Hall put it, the key shift was from 'a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics

of representation itself' (Hall in Mercer, 1988:27). So if we think about what was happening

concurrently in terms of media access, funding and anti-racist strategies during the post-riots

phase (discussed in Section 1), this struggle over the area of 'Black representation' was being

activated on two fronts: the first, was on the material side in relation to funding, distribution

and exhibition; and the second, was on the question of aesthetics itself - of how new paradigms, languages and agendas were being formed through and within the new Black diasporic arts (Mercer, 1994:18). In general, the 1980s saw a growth in research and commentary directly related to depictions of Black and Asian people in British film and television.[39] The radical impact of the arrival of Channel 4 in 1982 (see Chapters 3 and 9), the development of Black-British independent film (see Chapter 9) and struggles over the signifier 'Black' all became central features of these debates. The tenacious investment in notions of 'identity' in many of these discussions was not, as Mercer has observed, itself a new thing, but a sequel to debates around 'consciousness' in the 1960s and 'subjectivity' in the 1970s (Mercer in Grossberg et al, 1992:425).

One factor which became increasingly apparent through the 'new cultural politics of difference' (West, 1990), was how cultural and media theory itself became an important part of the newly-emerging Black-British cultural forms, and most notably of the new modes of Black-British independent film practice (see Chapter 9). Kobena Mercer, speaking about the projects of various Black artists and cultural workers in the 1980s (1988 'Black Film, British Cinema' Conference at the ICA, 'Cultural Identities' event at the Commonwealth Institute in 1986), notes the irony of this 'experience of finding a voice in the language of "theory"', (Mercer, 1994:20) at a time when higher education systems and public service institutions were themselves being transformed or closed down altogether and when the humanities and social sciences were severely under-funded. In fact, one of the most exciting and important breakthroughs in discussions around contemporary cultural formations, came with the debates around identity, diaspora aesthetics, 'third cinema' and hybridity, which were being introduced and advanced by a number of Britain's leading Black academics (Hall, Pines, Mercer, Gilroy,

Bhabha). It should be noted, however, that not all of these debates came from strictly 'within' the established tradition of Cultural Studies and often found new ways of discussing race, representation and culture. Furthermore, many of them were often critical of some of the work and ideological positions which had taken centre stage in the Cultural Studies discipline and began to register critiques of its nationalistic (its 'Englishness'), ethnocentric and gendered bias.[40] Indeed, some proposed that when reviewing and critiquing new Black-British film practices, a new model of criticism needed to develop which moved away from the grammar of Euro-American mainstream film theory. Mercer expressed a concern 'to explore whether a more adequate model of criticism might not be derived from the critical practice performed in the films themselves' (Mercer, 1994:56) and developed a notion of 'interruption' which would entail a more direct relationship between the critic and the text (see Mercer, 1994:53-66, Crusz, 1985:152-6, Henriques in Mercer, 1988:18-20, Gilroy in Grossberg et al, 1992:187-98).

At the root of many of these discussions since the 1980s, is the question of individualism Vs. collectivism; of whether one can actually represent (speak of/for) a lot of essentially different people with some overlapping interests/experiences at any one time. From how we should label ourselves, to what we should expect from Black creative artists, to how Black communities should be represented, to whether we should have specialist units (and if so what they should be called and who they should address), the dialogical interplay between aspects of heterogeneity and homogeneity have been *the* bone of contention in debates based around the terrain of race, representation and political action. What has become increasingly clear, is that 'the polarisation between essentialist and anti-essentialist theories of black identity has become unhelpful' (Gilroy, 1993a:x).[41] Here, the concept of 'diaspora' has become a particularly useful system of representation and unit of analysis through which the plurality

and diversity of Black-British communities is being reaffirmed. The central assertion here, is that Black people are, in fact, part of a diverse people, a diaspora. The central focus in the emerging diaspora arts was on themes and issues such as migration, colonization, displacement, marginalisation and exclusion. It is precisely this new emphasis (on syncretism not integration, on fluidity not fixity, on the processes of differentiation as much as the differences themselves) that has taken centre stage in expressions of cultural and political 'Blackness'. Much of Gilroy's work has been particularly important here, for its advancement of the concept 'diaspora' through which he argues that the new struggles within Black communities and Black cultural expression are about maintaining heterogeneity in order to not be subsumed into sameness. He argues that, 'Homogeneity can signify unity but unity need not require homogeneity' (Gilroy, 1993b:2). His analysis stretches beyond local boundaries and communities to a consideration of transnational networks across the US, Caribbean, Europe, Africa and Asia in the form of diaspora politics (Gilroy, 1993a) and the black Atlantic world (Gilroy in Grossberg et al, 1992:188). For Gilroy, these are 'intermediary concepts...exemplary because they break with the dogmatic focus on *national* cultures and traditions which has characterized so much Euro-American cultural thought', but he sees them as especially timely given the 'postmodern eclipse of the modern nation-state as a political, economic and cultural unit' (Gilroy in Grossberg et al, 1992:188). They do, as such, serve to move beyond nation and nationalism.

Amongst many critics today, there is a dominant emphasis on plurality through difference rather than sameness, and an understanding that we are all, in fact, *'ethnically* located' (Hall in Mercer, 1988:29). Here, the very concept of ethnicity is being reformed, not as something which relates to any fixed sense of our 'ethnic selves' or exclusively to 'Blackness', but as

something which we *all* occupy and from within which we can each express diversity (see Hall

in Mercer, 1988:27-30). This supposition has given rise to a number of cultural evaluations of

the meaning of 'race' and 'ethnicity', which have led, in part, to a set of discussions around

'Whiteness'.[42] Some cultural critics have emphasised the importance of 'defamiliarising'

notions of Whiteness; to interrogate it more critically, in order to appreciate it as a race of its

own (Gaines, 1988, West, 1990, hooks, 1992, Dyer, 1997). It has recently been noted that the

interdependency between notions of Whiteness and Blackness is inescapable; that if there was

no Whiteness there would be no Blackness. West argues that "Whiteness' is a politically

constructed category parasitic on 'Blackness" (West, 1990:29). Many have recognised that

there have been very few occasions when 'Whiteness' itself and more specifically English

people, have been depicted as a racial group with their own distinct culture, ethnicity and

identity; and that it is only Black people that are seen to 'own' an ethnicity or be part of an

intrinsic race. Thus it has been observed that naturalising Whiteness as though it is an invisible

norm reiterates how 'the very concept of color is a quality of Otherness, not of reality'

(Gilman, 1985:30). Studies of 'Whiteness', important as they are for their emphasis on 'race'

as a social construct and for their concern that 'race' is not only reserved for certain categories

of persons, are exceptions to the rule of 'race studies'.

(iv) Policy, Public Service and the New Debates

Current debates about race and television have tended to move towards a consideration of

policy, ownership and control in the context of the future, and specifically in the light of the

rapidly changing technological disposition of modern communication forms.[43] In highlighting

the significance of cultural modes and discourses in the social construction of reality, new

cultural evaluations have addressed the role and impact of new technologies and global

processes on how we are (and will be) located within the social and cultural world (West,

1990:19). Since the 1980s, the impact of two distinct but related stages, deregulation/market

forces and global changes/satellite have had profound effects on British television. In the light

of these changes, television itself - its programmes, its role, its value, its past, its future, its

economics, its relation to nationhood, citizenship and the public - is being reevaluated and

strategically modified. On the one hand, there is a belief that the rise of new technologies

(cable, satellite, digital compression, pay-per-view, etc.) will serve as one possible avenue

through which each person can be granted their 'cultural rights' in more specific and varied

ways. On the other, British broadcasting's traditional legislative and ideological framework is,

as a result of these and other shifts, widely believed to be under (commercial) threat.[44]

Television-specific policy is, indeed, losing ground as technological developments such as the

digital revolution, convergence and multimedia are homogenising the distinct regulatory

practices between various electronic media (Garnham in Briggs and Cobley, 1998:210-223).

Although these are discussions which will have to be progressed later in the thesis, it is worth

signalling here that these are issues which relate directly to Black-British audiences and media

workers. (I will provide a more detailed review of recent technological and industry changes in

Chapters 9 and 10, although my primary focus in this thesis is on content, not on economics

or technology.) At this stage, it is important to make some note about the cultural perspectives

and policies of British television, and specifically outline its conception of 'public service' (a

predominantly European phenomenon). This is not only because it is such a key area of

contestation in current debates around terrestrial television, but also because a reminder about

British television's central ethos, is essential in framing our understanding of the ways in

which it is required to and claims to operate.[45]

The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), as a major part of Britain's television history (a

monopoly until the 1954 Television Act and the arrival of Independent Television in 1955),

was traditionally founded on Reithian ideals which claimed to hold such ideals as access,

independence of thought, diversity of expression and programming, universality and

accountability in place, in order to ensure the corporation's status as a 'public service

institution'. It was required, through its original charter, to provide a public service for the

whole range of British society. Thus, from the outset, British broadcasting's core ideals related

to its conception of 'the British public', making it an important site for analysis in relation to

issues of national identity and citizenship. Such principles continue today and were, in

essence, reiterated in the 1992 BBC 'Green Paper on the Future', in its subsequent proposals

for the future as laid down in 'Extending Choice: The BBC's role in the new broadcasting age'

(1992) and in its Government White Paper, 'The Future of the BBC: Serving the Nation,

Competing Worldwide' (1994). Similarly, the commercial television sector has its own codes

(to be found in the ITC's Programme Code and in its Code of Advertising Standards and

Practice)[46] which roughly work in line with the notion of television as a 'public service' with

respect to impartiality, cultural sensitivity and moral responsibility. Thus, while the ways in

which commercial television is funded (through advertising rather than a licence-fee) might

appear to make it less publicly accountable, it too is required to work in line within specific

codes of conduct.[47] Indeed, all British terrestrial stations have been 'generalist' stations with

the mission to inform, educate and entertain (across a range of genres) all the people at least

some of the time. On the whole, policies which have determined the shape of 'the British

model' of broadcasting both in general terms, and with respect to its ethnic minorities, are held

in high esteem and a framework which many other (particularly European) countries have

attempted to emulate (see Frachon and Vargaftig, 1995). The manner in which the citadels of

British telecasting have approached 'race' are part of a widespread assumption of Britain as a tolerant and liberal society.

The five key features which have moulded the shape of the broadcasting structure in the UK are: one, the conception of public service with emphasis on quality, diversity and popularity; two, independence from yet sensitivity towards the political establishment; three, avoidance of mixed sources of funding[48] (BBC = licence fee; Independent TV = advertising); four, the predominance of terrestrial broadcasting and finally, accountability. In general terms, British television has claimed to act as a public sphere and civic forum, to offer universality of reception, to be duly impartial and sensitive to the need for taste and decency, and to reflect national identity and community. According to its main principles, the public service broadcasting ideal, 'recognises that we are all at different times parts of minority and majority groupings, belong to overlapping constituencies of tastes and interests. Public service broadcasting therefore seeks to avoid rigid preconceptions in the way provision is made, or as to the times at which the different types of programming are transmitted; and it must seek quality across the whole range of its programming, making 'popular programmes good' and 'good programmes popular'.[49]

The 1980s saw increasing criticisms of the public service ideal across Europe (see Negrine in Briggs and Cobley, 1998:224-237). In addition, there were a number of other factors such as the growth in product-culture, the end of 'official 'anti-racism', the drive towards greater deregulation, and an independent commissioning structure which began to have profound effects on the position of Black-British media workers and audiences (see Chapters 1, 3 and 9). The central question today, as put forward by a number of media theorists, is to what extent

and in what ways, British broadcasting can continue to hold these ideals of 'public service' in place - and, more specifically, to what extent 'generalist' terrestrial channels will be able to remain committed to addressing diversity and distinct, local audiences?[50] It is a question which has been especially pertinent following a number of key changes encouraged by the 1990 Broadcasting Act which triggered the deregulation and restructuration of terrestrial television, threatening to bring an end to the traditional duopoly (BBC/IBA) of British broadcasting. We have, in recent years, seen: the replacement of the Independent Broadcasting Authority by the Independent Television Commission; the selection of companies for the new commercial franchises (1.1.93); the BBC's Producer Choice (1993)[51] and split between Broadcasting and Production (1996);[52] the European Commission's Green Paper (1993);[53] the arrival of a fifth channel (Channel 5) in March 1997; the expansion of pay-TV systems and Direct Satellite Broadcasting,[54] and a general shift towards an independent commissioning structure and the casualisation of employment. As we move into the 21st century the key predicament that the terrestrial broadcasters are facing, is how to orchestrate a programming structure which is diverse, provides a public service and has commercial mass appeal.

NOTES

[1] Convergence is the coming together of telecommunication, broadcast, software, computing and internet services. Digital provisions and multiplexes (networks) are the driving force behind convergence. Digital television is a method of transmission which will allow more channels to be carried by the TV (cable, satellite, terrestrial) system. It is estimated that it will be between 10-15 years before the number of digital households will allow analogue (the existing system in which a signal is a measure of time according to a continuous flow of electricity) to be switched off.

[2] The terms 'liberal' and 'liberalism' will feature heavily in this thesis. Raymond Williams' explanation of the terms are particularly useful: 'liberal' originated as a term for a class of free people in C14, but in turn, became associated with being 'not harsh', 'generous' and 'open-minded'. By C19, it became a political term and, particularly in the US, associated with being progressive or radical. Williams notes the strain between socialism and liberalism where the former is often charged with being anti-freedom in the political sense, and the latter is often criticised for its individualism and thus for its conflict with socialist

and social theories. He concludes that 'liberalism' is 'a doctrine of certain necessary kinds of freedom, but also, and essentially, a doctrine of possessive individualism' (Williams, 1977:148-150; 150).

[3] This assumption was perfectly exemplified in BBC2's 'Politically Correct Night' (Tx:12.4.98) which 'dared' to show the types of 'racist images' which were screened on British television in the past - Alf Garnett, the Black and White Minstrel Show and the Robertson's Jam Golly. The implicit assumption here, was that the rest of today's television is 'politically correct' and that we are in fact 'beyond political incorrectness.' As Mark Lawson observed in the programme, the only way to screen (blatantly) 'politically incorrect' material today is with the armed guard of a 'Politically Incorrect package'.

[4] For example, the West Indian migrants on the *Empire Windrush* were described in the *Daily Express* as 'five hundred unwanted people' (21.6.48).

[5] See Phillips and Phillips (1998:230-241) on Michael X and the relationship he had with the British media.

[6] The three Race Relations Acts (1965, 1968 and 1976), all initiated under Labour governments, took on different measures to defend the rights of racial minorities. The 1965 Race Relations Act made it a criminal act to discriminate on grounds of colour. It established the Race Relations Board to monitor the act. Labour also set up the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, designed to help immigrants integrate.The 1968 Act established the Community Relations Council to liaise with the government regarding how to improve race relations. Under the 1976 Race Relations Act, the RRB and CRC merged to form the CRE.

[7] In 1964, the Conservative, Peter Griffiths, fought an openly racist campaign for his Smethwick (Birmingham) seat in the General Election, marking the first time that racist views were declared as reason for electoral support by a main political party. The Smethwick campaign and subsequent victory was followed by the success of Enoch Powell in mobilising popular anti-racist sentiment during the 1960s (see Chapter 2). 'Official' discrimination was also widespread in the form of legal quotas and laws such as that engineered by Edward Boyle in 1965, which sought to ensure that the proportion of 'immigrant' children in any one school should not exceed 30%; hence the implementation of school busing procedures in heavily-represented Black and Asian areas such as Southall.

[8] C.L.R. James, before a 'Black Power' movement had even been conceived of in those terms, 'pioneered the idea of an autonomous black movement which would be socialist and not subject to control by the leaderships of white-majority parties and trade unions' ('Biographical Introduction' to C.L.R. James The Future in the Present: Selected Writings, Allison and Busby, 1977, 8).

[9] Singh, who founded the Indian Workers' Association in 1938, was hanged on 25.6.40 after he shot Sir Michael O'Dwyer who had headed the 1919 Amritsar Massacre.

[10] See Sivanandan's 'Race, Class and the State' for an important class-based analysis of the Black experience in Britain (*Race and Class*, Vol. XVII, No.4, Spring 1976).

[11] It is useful to note Saussure's argument in relation to systems of representation and meaning. He noted that, 'signs are members of a system and are defined in relation to the other members of the system'. See Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, London: Peter Owen, 1960.

[12] In 1972, Idi Amin expelled 70,000 Asian Ugandans: 20,000 British-passport holding Ugandan Asians came to Britain, representing the last mass immigration which Britain was to face. It should be noted however, that ever since the racist associations between Westminster and Enoch during the 1960s, the Home Office became increasingly reluctant to openly discuss immigration in numbers (there are for example, no official figures on the number of illegal immigrants in Britain today, Immigration and Nationality Directorate briefing, 7.5.98).

[13] Speaking on ITV's World In Action in January 1978, Thatcher went on to say, "The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world, that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in" (quoted in *Daily Mail*, 31.1.78:1).

[14] See Fryer (1984) for a comprehensive list of where the riots took place. Also see Chapter 4 for how the 1981 riots were represented on television news.

[15] The *Race Today* journal was started by a group of Black radicals in the early 1970s. This documented some of the lesser publicised facts and events related to the Black-British experience (for example, the abundance of attacks on Black people including many political activists). The 'New Cross March' spanned ten miles from Deptford to Central London and was organised, in part, as a protest against racial discrimination by the police, the law and the media.

[16] The SUS laws (which allowed arrest on suspicion of loitering with intent to commit an offence) had been introduced in the late-1970s, under Section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act. Under SUS, research found that Black people were 14/15 times more likely to be arrested than Whites (P Stevens and C Willis Race, Crime and Arrests, Home Office Research Study, No.58, London: HMSO, 1979).

[17] The Swann Committee Report (1985) Education For All was particularly important here, not least for the debates it raised about the validity of multicultural approaches to education. See Twitchin (1988) and Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), particularly Chapter 6 'Resisting Racism'.

[18] Note Mike Phillips' critique of the GLC's ethnic minority arts policy for playing a 'destructive role in reinventing "black culture" as the signature of the Afro-Caribbean community' (Phillips New Statesman, 8.5.98). Also see Phillips and Phillips, 1998:368-380.

[19] Many of these efforts put the emphasis on 'society' and examined how society works in relation to different socio-cultural identities. Of course, it could be argued that they were partially reacting against Thatcher's anti-society drive; she had, after all, argued that, "there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women and families".

[20] For example, S.Hazareesingh 'Racism and Cultural Identity: An Indian perspective,' Dragon's Teeth, 1986, 24, who suggested that those from the South Asian subcontinent should be called 'Indian'. Also, T. Modood, '"Black" Racial Equality and Asian Identity' New Community, 1988 14 (3), who suggested the term 'Asian'. It is important to note that 'Black' held little political currency within certain non-White ethnic groups. This became especially apparent during the Rushdie affair, with many of those British-Muslims who protested against The Satanic Verses. At a Black MPs fringe meeting during the 1989 Black Section conference, Bernie Grant suggested that members of Black sections should support the anti-Rushdie Bradford Muslims because they too were Black. Of course, not all British-Muslims considered themselves as Black and not all Muslims were against the book, thus giving Grant's argument little political weight (see Chapters 2 and 3).

[21] Within the Asian community, this has been particularly evident in the way many describe themselves in relation to a religious group (i.e. 'Muslim' or 'Sikh').To a lesser extent, other terms began to be used such as the US-inspired 'people of colour', although this has also been criticised for its implicit assumption that White people are 'colourless' and as such, without a race.

[22] According to the 1991 Census, 5.5% (about 3 million) of the population in Britain are from non-white ethnic minorities. Half of these were born in Britain (see Appendix C).

[23] Key dates here are 1973 when the UK became a member state of the European Community (EC); 1986 when the Single European Act was signed by Margaret Thatcher; 1990 when the European Parliament's Ford report on racism and xenophobia was published; 1993 when the Maastricht Treaty came into force; 1997, the European Year against racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. There have also been various efforts to create an anti-racist network across Europe and the role of the CRE has been especially important here (see Dummett in Blackstone et al, 1998:204-220).

[24] An important analysis of English identity in a multiracial Britain could be found in Channel 4's England, My England (Tx:26.4.98), a programme produced by Trevor Phillips and presented by Darcus Howe and Peregrine Worsthorne.

[25] During the 1908s, the issue of immigration was particularly high on the political agendas in France, Italy and Germany , and there were a number of racist attacks on African migrants in Firenze in March 1990. It is difficult to quantify this rise in violent racism exactly, because of issues around the ways in which race crime is reported and recorded, but the British Crime Survey estimated that there were 130,000 racially-motivated incidents in 1991.

[26] It is interesting to note for example, that the targets of the Combat 18 campaign (the most notorious Nazi extremists in Britain whose slogan is 'White Revolution is the Only Solution!') allegedly included some of Britain's best known (mostly sporting) Black personalities and their partners such as Sharon Davis and her husband Derek Redmond and Frank and Laura Bruno (see Chapter 7).

[27] For a full bibliography of Stuart Hall's publications up to 1994, see Morley and Chen, 1996, 504-514.

[28] It should be noted that Bourne's analysis of film and television only focuses on light entertainment and drama.

[29] The main findings of the most recent CRE research were presented to a number of delegates within the broadcasting industry at the 1996 CRE 'Channels of Diversity: Race and Television in Britain' seminar, organised by the ITC and BBC on 14.3.96 (see Appendix D).

[30] Some of the work in the 1980s, although it outlined the historical struggles around the meaning of 'Black', paid very little or sometimes no critical attention to the work and cultural contribution of Asian

artists. Stephen Bourne's recent work entitled Black in the British Frame (1998) gives no explanation as to why Asians are excluded from his definition of 'Black'.

[31] The term 'ideology' has also been widely contested. See Eagleton Ideology: An Introduction, London: Verso, 1991; Strinati An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture, London: Routledge, 1995; Hall,1982 and Williams, 1977.

[32] In 1963, the British Home Office set up the Television Research Committee (Halloran was its secretary) in order to study the impact, content and function of television.

[33] Stuart Hall joined the Centre in 1964 and became its acting director in 1968 and subsequently its director until the late-1970s when he moved to the Open University.

[34] Questions of fantasy, voyeurism and the subconscious have more readily been applied to the cinema than to television, which is generally regarded as a more 'realistic' medium. The work of Mulvey, Heath, Lesage and Lacan and early shared concepts of fetishism, voyeurism, minor phase, desire and castration complex (developed in 1974-5 Screen and Elsaesser's 1972 Monogram special issue on melodrama) have only selectively been used in the analysis of the domestic medium of television.

[35] David Morley's early work around the Nationwide audience was particularly useful here, in shifting the focus from text to audience to argue that audiences are by no means passive or homogeneous receivers of media messages and that our readings of media messages are dependent on different social positions (Morley and Brunsdon, 1978). Morley criticised classic Screen- type theory on 'the subject' for not conceiving the subject as 'already constituted in other discursive formations and social relations' and of thus isolating 'the encounter of text and reader from all social and historical structures and from other texts' (Morley, 1980:163). Focusing on disparate texts and diverse subjects, Morley also found it problematic that those theorists (such as Steve Neale) who spoke of the 'abstract text-subject relationship' treated the subject 'in relation to only one text at a time (or, alternatively, all texts were assumed to function according to the rules of a single 'classic realist text').

[36] See Lola Young, 1996, for a detailed account of different psychoanalytic approaches to the reading of race.

[37] During the 1988 'Black People in British Television' conference held in Norwich, there were even calls by Farrukh Dhondy (then Channel 4's Multicultural Programmes Editor) to ban the use of the words 'stereotype' and 'positive image' when discussing the issue.

[38] For example, at the 'Black People in British Television' event which was held at Cinema City, Norwich (13-15.5.88) and the 'Black Film British Cinema Conference' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in February, 1988. Also note the debates at the Black and White in Colour Conference (subtitled 'Prospects in Black Intervention in British Film and Television') at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in November 1992. Also see Twitchin, 1989.

[39] In 1985, the BFI began a 'Race and Ethnicity' project which aimed, through archival research, to rediscover the struggle for representation and employment of Black people in British television.

[40] Amos and Parmar in CCCS, 1982; Gilroy in Grossberg et al, 1992:187-198; Gilroy on Raymond Williams, 1987:49-57; Mercer, 1994:20-21; Isaac Julien's critique of Alan Lovell's Screen article on the Black workshops, 1991:64-68; Paul Willemen's reference to Screen's 'theoretical super-ego' (Willemen 'An Avant-Garde for the 80s Framework,1982, 24).

[41] The BFI 'Black and White in Colour' Conference held in November, 1992 was important for discussing some of these issues. Its Panel discussions were broken down into 'Multiculturalism and Beyond', 'International Scenario', 'Comedy and Light Entertainment' and 'Drama'.

[42] 'Whiteness' has also been the subject of many films and conferences although it could be argued that, on some of these occasions, it has merely served to centralise White people's experiences and perspectives yet again. For example, the early 1990s saw a spate of discourses where the central protagonist was a White man finding it difficult to cope with his (racial and sexual) Others in a rapidly changing world. For example Falling Down (Dir: Joel Schumacher, USA 1992) and White Man's Burden (Dir: Desmond Nakano, USA/France, 1995) and the US publication, Heterodoxy. On 13 -14 July, 1996, Kingston University held a conference entitled 'The Revision of England' in Film and Literature, 1945-95' in which David Gervais began his plenary lecture by asking 'Is there really any such thing as Englishness?'

[43] For example, various debates at the 1996 Edinburgh International Television Festival. Also see Frachon and Vargaftig, 1995, Ross, 1996.

[44] On 31 March, 1998, Chris Smith (the Culture and Media Secretary) agreed that in a multi-channel environment, traditional regulation would be bound to have a 'lighter touch' (cited from the 'Audio-

Visual Communications and Broadcasting Regulations' Select Commons Committee meeting, 31.3.98). In April 1998, there were a host of debates and arguments about the future of the BBC, in particular relation to the license fee (described as an "aggressive poll-tax" by both Rupert Murdoch and Gerald Kaufman (the Chairman of the Select Commons Committee for Culture, Media and Sports who suggests that the BBC be privatised)) and its commercial interests (the **Big Ticket** (1998-) lottery show). The licence-fee has been defended by the BBC as a necessity in order to guarantee that the BBC continues to address diversity and provide good programming for everyone (Alan Yentob (BBC Director of Television) on **Right To Reply**, Tx:18.4.98). In developing itself as a global media company, the BBC is also set to gain revenue from its commercial ventures with cable and satellite producers (Discovery, BBC America).

[45] In 1992, a conference was held in the Netherlands which looked specifically at the issue of public service broadcasting in a multicultural Europe (PBME). A second conference was held in 1995. One of the outcomes of PBME was *Spectrum magazine* (launched in 1993 and distributed by the BBC Equal Opportunities Department). This aimed to present a campaigning voice against racial intolerance and support Black media representation and access (see Appendix M).

[46] In 1994, the Advertising Standards Authority (a self-regulating body) entered a new clause which read, 'Advertisements should contain nothing that is likely to cause serious or widespread offence. Particular care should be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or disability' (Clause 14).

[47] Commercial Television has always had a regulatory body. This was the Independent Broadcasting Authority until 1991, when it was replaced by the Independent Television Commission. It is widely agreed that the IBA was closer and more strictly in line with the BBC's public service model and that, in the context of the Conservative Government's push towards deregulation and privatisation during the 1980s, the ITC was made to represent a more flexible regulatory approach. The ITC is responsible for ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and satellite and cable broadcasters in Britain.

[48] The BBC is forbidden from making money from the selling of commercial airtime, getting most of its income from the licence fee, but it does depend, in part, on funds from tie-ins and programme paraphernalia such as magazines, books, records and videos.

[49] Quoted from The Public Service Idea in British Broadcasting: Main Principles, Broadcast Research Unit , 1985, 3. Of course, the fact that specifically-targeted programmes such as 'Black' and 'Asian' programmes are provided goes against this principle of universality (see Chapter 10).

[50] For a general, theoretical discussion on the private/public sphere in broadcasting, see Richard Collins 'Public service versus the market ten years on: reflections on Critical Theory and the debate on broadcasting policy in the UK' *Screen* 34.3, Autumn 1983, 243-259.

[51] The premise of the BBC's 'Producer Choice' was to introduce an internal market (by boosting competition between internal and external resources), encourage the out-sourcing of production and make individual producers responsible for budgeting their programmes.

[52] In 1996, the BBC, in an attempt to increase its flexibility, announced that it would restructure into five main divisions: Broadcast, Production, News, Resource and Worldwide.

[53] The 1993 Green Paper addressed the question of European television's future competitiveness.

[54] The influence of cable, although important at this time, was still not widespread - statistics claimed that less than 5% had cable installed in 1994, although 15% were able to receive satellite TV. This figure is expected to grow dramatically by the end of the century. Figs taken from Dominick et al, 1996. In 1992, 5-7% of the total audience was tuning in to extraterrestrial channels.

PART I

FACTUAL PROGRAMMES

Chapter Two

Documenting 'Race Relations' and the Black Social Object/Subject in the 1950s and 1960s

This is the first of two chapters focusing on how documentary programmes on British

television have depicted 'the Black subject' or 'the Black experience' in relation to Britain.[1]

Although my main concern here is with examining on-screen representations, I also want to use

both of these chapters to put them in the context of some of the wider social, cultural and

political movements in British 'race relations' (see Chapter 1). This first paper takes this story

up to the end of the 1960s, which I would suggest was a key turning-point in changing popular

attitudes towards 'race' and representations of 'Black-Britishness' and when the Black person

in documentary became not so much a 'social subject' (the theme of discussion and

representation) as a 'social problem' (a 'difficulty' to be 'solved' or 'removed'). My basic

claim here is that this shift represented a move from discussing the problem of racism to

discussing the problem of race *per se*.

The introductory section of this chapter sets the question of race and representation in the

wider context of the documentary genre on British television. Here I will review some of the

arguments around what documentary is, how it operates and how its relationship to

broadcasting developed. I also think it is important, without getting too caught up in trying to

deconstruct definitions, to address why documentary has come to be associated with an

unmediated recording of actuality and with notions of truth, realism and spontaneity - and

what implications this might have had for its audiences. The second section, therefore, will

focus not only on what British television audiences learnt about race through documentary, but

on *how* that knowledge was treated in terms of 'truthfulness'. It is worth reminding ourselves

here, that many White Britons (particularly those who did not live in racially-mixed areas) had

very little or no contact with Black people. Given television's early authoritative standing and

the fact that it was the principal medium which foregrounded the issue of British 'race

relations', what it said and showed of the Black presence was crucial in shaping what was

known about Black people and how attitudes towards them were subsequently formed. I have

selected various case studies to exemplify the key ways in which the Black subject was

approached in television documentary in the 1950s and 1960s. Through these I identify,

amongst other things, the 'social problem' discourse as a key way of documenting race. The

case studies I have chosen, although they reveal some quite mundane and repetitive approaches

to documenting 'race', are also useful in tracing the key representational strategies of the race-

relations documentary. Thus, my first case study in Section 1 looks at how the classic liberal,

reformist documentary tended to locate the problem of discrimination, while my later case

studies examine how immigration in particular and race *per se* began to be identified as a social

problem. In the final section, I will consider the impact of Enoch Powell on changing the style

and language of public (television) debates around the Black presence in Britain.

Section 1: The Development of Social Documentary on Television

a) Early Documentary Influences

Documentary is often considered as the direct antithesis of fiction, although it too shares with

fiction the important and subjective processes of selection, lighting, camera angles and editing.

The documentary style has been widely considered as more 'real', in that it films 'natural'

footage of actual settings, people and events. It aspires, through presenting aspects of 'real

life' (people, situations or events), towards capturing actuality. Although it is sometimes true

that selected 'real-life' footage is included, the point is that this alone does not form the

completed documentary. Documentary therefore, presents reality mimetically; it might 'reflect

reality' but it does not represent reality itself. As Alexandra Kluge asserts, the documentary

film is 'shot with three cameras; the first is the camera in the technical sense; the second is the

filmmaker's mind and the third relates to the generic patterns of the documentary film, which

are founded on the expectations of the audience that patronizes it' (quoted in Trinh T.Minh-ha

in Renov, 1993:98). The mythology of the camera as a tool of authority which can effectively

record an untouched and complete 'reality' has secured naturalism as the dominant language of

British television. But this naturalism has also been widely critiqued as one of the medium's

classic myths (Hall, 1975, Williams, 1977). Stuart Hall for example, has argued that, 'television

is technically and socially a *thoroughly manipulated medium*. The utopia of straight

transmission, of the 'naturalistic fallacy' in television, is not only an illusion - it is a dangerous

deception' (Hall, 1975:97). Nevertheless, the documentary tradition in particular has claimed

realism as its generic marker.

The term 'documentary' (*documentaire*) was first used by John Grierson in 1926 in reference

to Robert Flaherty's film **Moana** (USA, 1926) (Hardy, 1979:35). Grierson, who led the

British documentary movement in the 1930s during his time with the Empire Marketing Board

Film Unit (1928-33) and General Post Office Film Unit (1933-1939), produced a number of

state-sponsored yet 'anti-establishment' documentary films. There was also a smaller and

alternative body of documentary-work produced by film co-operatives and societies, many

with the explicit aim of critiquing the hegemony of the ruling classes. The British cinema work

of the 1930s and war-years has been described as that in which 'a poetic realist imagination

had combined with a distinctive sense of national identity and community to produce what

seemed to some to be the 'documentary idea'' (Corner, 1991:42). This 'documentary idea' not only related to truth, but to ideals of mutuality and national identity; a shared sense of 'our' world. There was a clear incorporative strategy of locating the audience ('the people') *inside* the society ('the nation') which was being addressed. Ironically, there was also an obvious material distance between the film/radio documentarist, the social referent and the viewer/listener, so that very few of 'the people' would occupy the space of the documentary itself. In addition, a modernist approach to form and content in a lot of this work, and the discourse of 'poetic realism' through which much of it operated, meant that it actually made 'the ordinary strange, beautiful - *poetic* ' (Higson, 1996:137). For example, many of Grierson's films (such as **Coal Face**, 1935 and **Night Mail**, 1936), although verifiably liberal and democratic in intent, arguably served to dehumanise and romanticise their subjects (Cooke in Nelmes, 1996:308-11). This revealed the essential void between the camera's and (mostly working class) protagonists' viewpoints and therefore produced in the audience a sense of distance from the film's central concerns. A consideration of the aesthetic dimensions of documentary production (or what Grierson termed 'the creative treatment of actuality') needed to acknowledge the necessarily organised principles of the genre; the planning and compositional process involved in selecting, scripting and ordering film and sound.

The radical and democratising potential of film continued to be realised by cinema activists in the Free Cinema Movement of the 1950s, led by British New Wave directors such as Lindsay Anderson. This new set of documentarists, who had been influenced in particular by John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings, but also by the political documentaries of the Worker's Film and Photo League of America (1930-35), stood against what they saw as the repression, class and gender bias, not to mention the lack of creativity in mainstream British films.[2] They

emerged alongside the growth of the so-called New Left in the late-1950s and represented an

emerging concern with sociological notions of class, culture and community as witnessed in the

seminal work of, for example, Richard Hoggart (The Uses of Literacy, 1957) and Raymond

Williams (Culture and Society, 1958). Many of these films displayed a deep commitment to

civic education, social justice and liberalism and to the notion of a Welfare State system (in fact

Norman Swallow referred to their work as 'the 'Art of The Welfare State', cited in Corner,

1991:57). In this sense, their interests were similar to those of the photographic journal

Picture Post (1938-57), described by Stuart Hall as geared towards 'the democratization of

the subject' (Hall, 1972:83).

Though it cannot be said that the agendas of all these early documentarists were the same,

Grierson's view that most were concerned with 'sociological rather than aesthetic views'

almost universally applied (Hardy, 1979:78). The *sociological* dimension of documentary was

evident in its important and sensitive positioning within the political and social structures of

'public communication', 'public knowledge' and 'public opinion', but also resulted from the

self-proclaimed social-democratic objectives frequently expressed by the documentary artists

themselves and the social concerns which dominated their work (e.g. social and occupational

change, social problems, the lives and circumstances of ordinary people) (see Corner, 1986:ix).

There was a continued interest in notions of nationhood and community but also a belief in

what John Corner has termed the 'radical revelatory' potentials of the genre. Many saw the

documentary as playing an integrationalist role, binding different classes and categories of

persons into a single nation. Another formative sense of documentary was of its instructive

role in relation to 'the public', of 'informing the people' (Dziga Vertov - Kino-Pravda/Camera-

Truth), thus being a classic form of public service. This early sociological documentary

tradition was to evolve institutionally within Britain's public broadcaster, the BBC, but also,

not surprisingly (given its generic contradictions), in quite ambivalent ways.

b) Developing the Documentary Genre on Television

Early documentary forms were developed both within the context just outlined and according

to the cultural agendas and technological and political determinants of the early BBC years.

Reithian ideals of the BBC as a national cultural institution with a collective personality made

early BBC documentaries an important form of 'public service broadcasting', with the

responsibility of informing and educating the public on certain issues (Kumar, 1974).[3]

Television documentary, which only substantially began to develop in the 1950s, was

influenced both by the Griersonian discourses of the 1930s and by other areas of public service

broadcasting (and most notably by BBC Radio Features based in Manchester in the mid-

1930s, which had attempted to reduce the distance between audience, producer and subject by

incorporating local people in its output).[4] But it too was notable for its absence of people

(Swallow, 1966:194). This gap was to be filled in by what John Corner has called the

"accessed voice" (Corner, 1995:83); the 'ordinary' person, who rather than being *referred to*,

would now apparently *speak for themselves*.

Historical accounts of the formation years of television indicate that, although the medium was

recognised as a new form of mass communication, its impact was yet to be fully realised - by

politicians, the public or indeed by the BBC itself. The first time a complete programme would

be seen, was when it went on air. This afforded a somewhat casual approach to programming,

even from the broadcasters themselves.[5] During the post war years, such indifference

diminished as technology and working practices became more sophisticated and internal

structures were reorganised. Within this, the specific importance of documentary for the medium began to be realised. In 1953, Paul Rotha was appointed Head of Documentaries. He stated:

> ...ephemeral as a one-night stand television may be, but to counteract its sudden birth-and-death is its fantastic simultaneous access to a mass audience under conditions wholly different from the movie in the cinema...To those who still believe that documentary has a specific social job to do, this mass access to audiences and quick answer is of paramount importance. It is something new in the documentary experience. (Rotha, quoted in Bell in Corner, 1986:71)

The exclusive position which the BBC had maintained for close to twenty years, had allowed it to develop an unrivalled and unique style of mass access and enunciation.[6] This alone heightened the relative sense of authority and integrity which the documentary form was already generally assumed to embody. By 1955, the presence of a rival in the shape of the alternative broadcasting system of ITV marked the end of a BBC monopoly. It also introduced new formats and styles of documentary address including 'fly-on-the-wall' and drama-documentary. The live nature of the medium in the early years further accentuated the effect of naturalism, which was essential in establishing the truth claims of television documentary with the audience. Despite the talk of immediacy, large production teams were still needed which made filming slow and cumbersome and television camera equipment heavy and awkward, so that there was little chance of catching spontaneous, natural, social action or 'real life'. One solution was to 'stage' reality in what came to be known as the 'drama-documentary' mode. The introduction of lightweight 16mm television cameras in the early 1960s, added to the sophistication with which truth could be mediated, since film-makers could move out of the studio with greater ease and create a closer sense of intimacy with their subject.

c) The Emergence of Television's 'Social Eye'

Prior to the 1950s, British television's 'social eye' was yet to fully develop. As Paddy

Scannell says of the BBC at this time:

> it saw its task as an essentially neutral projection of the outside world into
>
> the living room, of providing 'a panorama of actualities' that ranged from the
>
> rituals of the sporting calendar to those of royalty and the state. In projecting
>
> and affirming a corporate national life, the BBC saw itself as merely
>
> reflecting, passing on in an unmediated form to the viewers their own
>
> national heritage. (Scannell, 1979:97)

It was the BBC Talks department (later to become 'Current Affairs') which saw itself as

directly addressing political affairs. Quite apart from this, a documentary tradition developed

which dealt specifically with 'the social'.[7] Such distinctions between the state (political) and

society (social/welfare) were naturally contradictory, since the two were obviously deeply

linked. Hemmed in by notions of welfarism, the social documentary foregrounded the question

of individual rights and social justice which many of Britain's lead documentarists clearly felt

the need to address. Two points should be noted here: the first, was that the liberal rationale

behind the making and presentation of many of these social documentaries could not be

assumed to work in harmony with notions of a shared 'system of common life', or more

particularly, a socially multicultural Britain. As Raymond Williams reminded us, 'liberalism is

a doctrine based on INDIVIDUALIST theories of man and society and is thus in fundamental

conflict not only with SOCIALIST but with most strictly SOCIAL theories...Liberalism is

then a doctrine of certain necessary kinds of freedom but also, and essentially, a doctrine of

possessive individualism' (Williams, 1976:150) (see Chapter 1 for a more extensive definition).

Thus, whilst the liberal discourse might have addressed the issue of cultural difference (as a reason for racial intolerance), the question of equality and rights to access for Black people was not the overriding concern. And secondly, not all social documentaries worked in the same way. De Nitto suggests three categories of social commentary: the first of these is *Social Description* which, 'has its primary purpose to present to an audience social conditions, particularly how an environment and institutions affect the lives of people. Any criticism of these conditions is oblique, implied rather than stated'; the second is *Social Criticism* where, 'the director is less objective, and his intention is to make audiences conscious that something is wrong with their society and should be remedied'; and the third is *Social Protest* when, 'a director is angry about a situation and wishes to induce outrage in his audience and even provoke them to action' (De Nitto, 1985:330).

At this time, the television social documentary belonged primarily to the first and second categories. It tended to depict a series of 'real to life' dilemmas and 'dealt with' issues such as old age, youth delinquency, housing and unemployment. It would:

> take an issue, ask what is being done about it and examine the extent to
> which it is or is not being satisfactorily dealt with...the social subject is
> structured from *our* point of view (i.e. the audience), and our concerns with
> current problem areas in our society. (Scannell, 1979:97)

It is interesting then, that documentary became the preferred genre for discussions around 'race', and that documentary realism became the principal discourse through which 'Blackness' was framed - thus, implying that Black people or 'race relations' needed to be considered as social problems. The race-focused documentary tended to fall into two categories: one, looking at the foreign context (particularly rife in the early to mid-1950s); and the other at Black

people within the terrain of home affairs (mostly in the mid-1950s to late-1960s). The latter

(which is our central concern here), were a set of social investigations which worked within

established, hybrid formats of interviews, observation, exposition and dramatisation. The

social subject, as constructed in documentary programming of the 1950s and 1960s, was

usually an oppressed, troubled one, positioned in direct relation to social crisis and problems

in contemporary Britain and it was through them that inequality and the need for social change

in modern Britain was explored. The dominant approach in Black and race-centred

documentaries attempted to depict the 'real life' experiences of Black people, and show 'how

they really were'. This overwhelmingly anthropological approach is what we can refer to as

'social realism', usually produced in an attempt to make us, the viewer, understand Black

people better - to de-alienate them. These projects mostly fit into a humanist paradigm and

displayed an obvious sense that the members of 'the British community' needed to co-exist in

such a way as to assure the health and prosperity of 'the nation'. As such, they continued the

reformatory tradition and the process of democratisation which had hitherto been established

by previous generations of documentary workers. It is with this emphasis on the 'social

subject', the 'social problem' and 'state intervention' in mind, that I want to begin my first

case study.

d) CASE STUDY 1: The 'Social Subject' Documentary
Special Enquiry: Has Britain A Colour Bar? (1955)

'You and your black friends ought to be put up against a wall and shot.'

(Response sent to Robert Reid, presenter of Has Britain a Colour Bar?,

Reid, 1960:980)

Special Enquiry (BBC1, Tx:1952-57) was a major social problem discourse of the 1950s.

Norman Swallow, the producer of the BBC monthly series, recounts:

> I said, why don't we do a series of enquiries, which have not been done
>
> before, into social problems - social, not political, by the way, always social,
>
> never political...I think in human terms, I'm concerned about the problems of
>
> human individuals, I go for things I feel strongly about, my heart beats
>
> about. (Swallow, interview with Bell in Corner, 1986)

Swallow planned for **Special Enquiry** to be a television version of **Picture Post** (Swallow,

unaddressed memo, 27.2.52). It was hoped that the series would be from 'our'/the audience's

point of view and that in using an 'approachable' (named) presenter/reporter together with

mixed modes of documentation (filmed bulletins, a studio-base and 'non-official' voices) a new

kind of journalism could be structured (Corner, 1991:48). **Has Britain a Colour Bar?** (BBC,

Tx:31.1.55) was the first full-length television documentary to examine the problems faced by

Black immigrants. The programme, presented by Robert Reid and narrated by Rene Cutforth,

was a combination of filmed report (in Birmingham), reconstructions, interviews and narration.

It began with a reconstruction of a Black man (identified in the narration as a "British citizen")

being refused accommodation in a number of lodging houses and followed with similar

prejudice being displayed towards Black people in different spheres of society. A number of

interviews followed with Birmingham residents (non-officials) and local government and union

officials (experts) who discussed whether or not Britain had a colour bar.

Asked why the colour bar issue was selected for the **Special Enquiry** series, the producer,

Anthony De Lotbiniere, suggests that there was no conscious effort to cover the subject but

that it was seen as both a sensitive and topical issue (**Black and White In Colour** archive

interviews).[8] There had, of course, already been evidence of racial tension in Camden in 1954

and the recent influx of West Indian workers to areas such as Birmingham, prompted the team

to trace the impact of their arrival. Lotbiniere emphasises the total licence given to early

documentarists; there would be no preview or vetting procedure and no real thought or

discussion before the programme went to air. The huge film camera and the running out of

cables however, guaranteed a laborious production process. Furthermore, despite its

naturalistic effect, a documentary such as **Has Britain A Colour Bar?** was carefully staged. It

was, in fact, a drama documentary where effects were produced, scripts were co-ordinated,

opinions staged and reactions anticipated. Lotbiniere notes, "You could try to get the truth,

but you could never do it without falsifying it" (ibid). There were, for example, no vox pops in

Has Britain A Colour Bar? so that the 'direct' testimonies about racism were in fact,

previously rehearsed and the house-owners who objected to Black lodgers were acting for the

cameras.

Central to the production of the documentary then, was the role played by the makers'

background *assumptions*. The documentary-makers had to assume a certain truth or have a

clear agenda before they shot the film. So for example, there was one scene in which a Black

man walked into a pub and banged on the bar loudly to order a drink. The shot cut to the

White drinkers in the pub who turned round to look, in disdain, at the Black man and his pub

ritual. Although this scene was intended to exemplify the hostility which Black 'newcomers'

often faced, this 'bar banging' was also used in the documentary as an example of cultural

difference. Cutforth's commentary explained, "That's the way you order a drink in Jamaica -

but it puts people's backs up in Birmingham". But rather than being a significant mark of

difference, this scene was only in fact included in the documentary because, according to

Lotbiniere, *some* of the British people interviewed by the documentary team *said* they thought that Black people banged on the bar when ordering drinks. The general viewer however, was invited to read this as an 'authentic' mark of racial difference because of the claims to authenticity arising from the aesthetic of realism in which the text was working (i.e. the general audience were never told that these events had been staged). In fact, in the pre-edit (unknown to the audience), it was Lotbiniere who was standing in the Black actor's place and who cued the pub-drinkers to turn and stare at him. It is worth asking here whether such a televisual moment reflected or constructed how racial difference was perceived. Did it make White audiences (to whom the programme was clearly addressed) understand Black people in Britain batter or relate to them on more equal terms? Did it present the harsh reality and racist premise of a colour bar in Britain in serious enough terms? Of course, this was a time when Black people were largely the subjects of curiosity for White people, most of whom had very little direct experience or contact with Black people. So what was the purpose and effect of this focus on alleged 'personal habits'?

Has Britain a Colour Bar? followed a distinct narrative logic which, I would argue, was to become the basic narrative structure of the race relations documentary - the master narrative of 'race relations' documentary television. Not only was it a logic which articulated around 'our' (White British people's) cultural values Vs. 'theirs' (Black people's), but it was a logic which reflected primarily the product of underlying assumption about difference. I want to quote directly from the BBC's Rough Outline Treatment (in italics) to outline how the programme-makers' assumptions shaped their approach to this 'special enquiry'. I have broken these areas of focus down into categories:[9]

1) Arrival: Why and how Black people came to Britain, Empire Windrush (June 1948).

2) Employment: *Nurses...postmen...clerks. Places have been found for coloured workers in all types of jobs. A few like Mr Croal work in positions of authority over white men.*

3) Housing: *Householder: says that he likes Africans and Indians but hopes they don't try to buy the other half of his house. Why? The value would go down in no time! Commentary: Impact of coloured people obviously takes time to get over. Let's face it these people are different.*

4) Crime: *Series of newspaper headlines depicting the most frightful crimes committed by black men. Commentary: At first they were an object of curiosity and suspicion for the way they behaved as much as for their colour...Popular belief would have it that all coloured men are dope pedlars, sex maniacs and pimps.*

5) Miscegenation: *Black man with white girl. Tony says, 'I know one thing - I wouldn't have any of them in my house around the missus!" He should (but it's doubtful) develop a tough piece about all the coloured man wants is a white woman.*

6) Overcrowding : *The film report ends with shots of milling crowds in Birmingham streets to give pictorial emphasis to overcrowding.*

From this Rough Outline Treatment, it is obvious not only what the programme-makers' central concerns were in relation to the Black presence, but also the ways in which they decided to approach them. A high sense of drama and conflict (between Black and White people) was actively constructed through the programme. Moreover, the documentary itself heightened the 'foreignness' of its central concern. As the narrative stated, "they look *different* and they sound *different* and their tastes in matters of food are *different*" (my emphasis). Later we heard a Black man's disillusionment with Britain which he attributed to people's anxiety

over cultural difference. Taking on the position of the 'average British person' confronted with these 'cultural differences', the documentary commentary responded, "But let's face it, they *are* different."

Now **Has Britain A Colour Bar?** was clearly set up as an exposition of the fact that such anxiety and discrimination existed, and in that sense it was a landmark programme. But, throughout the programme, it was cultural difference - not racism, institutional discrimination, or the law - which was explicitly implicated as the primary reason for racial discrimination. And since it was constantly being implied that some anxiety over these differences was inevitable, that evidence of a colour bar which was found was, to a large degree, rationalised. It is also interesting to note that the more explicit the racism expressed, the more plainly working-class was the racist who held that view, so that the obvious 'middle-classness' of the documentarists served in effect to disassociate them from the racist views being aired by their accessed subjects.[10] **Has Britain A Colour Bar?** was provocative for its time in acknowledging that racial discrimination did exist and by urging tolerance (hence the hostile response from some White viewers). However, it approached its enquiry with a liberal caution which disidentified the documentary-makers from any obvious tone of racism and this, in fact, prevented it from coming to any radical conclusions. As the *Daily Sketch* acutely observed, 'with scrupulous fairness the BBC balanced each blow against the West Indians with a defence of them' (quoted in Corner, 1991:47).

e) The Emergence of Black Magazine Documentaries

The advent of Black programming in the mid-1950s, operated as an extension of the BBC's core ideals of liberalism and public service broadcasting. Black-targeted programmes were, by

and large, an integration service for 'immigrants' (a coverword for 'not belonging') and were

designed to:

(i) help integrate newly arrived Asian immigrants into their new environment

through practical advice and

(ii) act as a link with the Indian sub-continent through performances and

interviews with items on abroad.

(BBC Multicultural Programmes Department/BBC Pebble Mill Pamphlet,

1995)

Those seen to be most in need of tips for 'integration' (more so than African-Caribbeans

whose language, dress and religions were often similar to the English), were Asians, so it was

to them that the first specialist programmes were addressed. Asians were also widely seen to

be the most different from Englishness and, it was felt by some, 'showed almost no interest in

being integrated' (Patterson, 1969). **Asian Club** (BBCTV, 1953-61) was introduced to British

television to commemorate twenty-one years of the BBC's General Overseas Service on which

the radio version of **Asian Club** had been broadcast for ten years. The television version set

up a live studio-audience made up of people from all over Asia (India, Pakistan, China, Burma,

Indonesia, Japan and Ceylon). They were asked to discuss various issues and problems with

an invited special guest speaker. Rosemary Sands hosted the programme and guests included

Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, Sir Christopher Hinton, Kenneth More and Bertrand Russell.

Although **Asian Club** appeared to acknowledge the fact that television could be used to cater

for a specific audience, it also had an explicitly integrationalist project which was predicated on

the *difference* of the Asian immigrant. In 1965, the newly-formed Campaign Against Racial

Discrimination demanded that the BBC provided programmes which made Britain's Black

communities feel a more integral part of British society and Asians in particular, argued the

case for a separate programme. Many Asians, having come from traditions of pluralism in

terms of language, countries (Indian/Pakistan since 1947) and religion (Muslims, Sikhs,

Hindus) thought it only natural that they were catered for in the name of diversity. The result

of this request was **Apna Hi Ghar Samajhiye** (which can loosely be translated as 'Consider

this as your home') which began in October 1965 and was broadcast on Sunday mornings both

on BBC1 and on radio. Its main aim was to improve the English of those Asians who were

newly arrived in Britain or who had, to date, been unable to learn English 'adequately'. **Nai**

Zindagi Naya Jeevan (New Life) (BBC1, Tx:24.11.68-82), had similar priorities, although

it's repertoire was a little broader. These programmes were produced by the Immigrants Unit

and mainly presented in Hindustani (a combination of Urdu and Hindi).

The early 1980s brought **Asian Magazine** (a weekly 30 minute magazine programme screened

early on Sunday mornings) and **Gharbar (Household)** (a 25 minute programme for Asian

women screened on Wednesday afternoons). These were 'public service broadcasts' in the

classic sense of attempting to provide all licence-payers with a broadcasting service, but they

were, in fact, a form of 'narrow- casting' because their agendas were so limited. **Gharbar** was

primarily concerned with what were defined as 'women's issues' such as health, hygiene,

marriage, house-keeping and career advice (see Anwar and Shang, 1982). There were regional

variations such as **Aap Kaa Hak (This Is Your Right)**, a consumer advice programmes for

Asians which was broadcast in Manchester. The dominant assumption behind most of these

programmes was that any problems which Asian people faced in Britain, could be eradicated

by the assimilation of 'Asianness' into 'Englishness'. Nevertheless, at a time when many

Asians inevitably felt alienated from the primary sources of information and entertainment in

Britain, these programmes did indicate that efforts were being made to address non-English

viewers.[11] The integrationalist rationale behind many of these programmes represented a liberal position which favoured cultural co-existence, compared to, for example, the suggestion of voluntary repatriation which was to make itself publicly known in the 1960s.[12]

Section 2: The 1960s - From 'Social Subject' to 'Social Problem'

During the 1960s, the regular, mainstream, documentary slots such as **World In Action** (Granada TV, 1963-), **This Week** (A-R, 1956-68, Thames TV, 1968 -) and **Panorama** (BBCTV, 1953-) represented Black people in five main areas of documentary:

1) Investigative 'social' reports into housing, miscegenation, employment and 'false equality' in relation to the Black-British presence.

2) Foreign affairs and the non-British Black experience, with a focus on key individuals such as Martin Luther King, Mohammed Ali and 1960s US-centred movements such as the Black Panthers and Black Muslims and also on South Africa and Rhodesia in the mid-1960s.

3) Arts and sports documentaries focusing on, for example, the work of James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and George Lamming.

4) Historical documentaries such as **The Lords of India** (BBC 1964), **The Black Man in Britain, The British Empire** (BBC 1972) and **The Fight Against Slavery.**

5) Reports on neo-fascist political movements in Britain.

The thrust of many early social documentaries was emotive and sentimental but very rarely political. Indeed, the political ideologies of reformist texts, as Hall argued in reference to **Picture Post,** were such that:

> Its "social eye" was a clear lens. But its "political eye" was far less decisive.
> It pinpointed exploitation, misery and social abuse, but always in a language

which defined these as "problems" to be tackled and remedied with energy

and goodwill: it was instinctively reformist. (Hall, 1972:109)

Two social documentaries which profiled the Black subject (although they each worked in

quite different ways), were **Black Marries White** (Tx:29.4.64, Dir: Peter Morley) and **The**

Colony (Tx:16.6.64, Dir: Philip Donnellan).[13] We can see that each of these documentaries,

made in the same year, set up 'real life' situations through which to explore the 'social

problems' which were assumed to accompany immigration. But whilst **The Colony** focused

on social factors such as housing and employment, **Black Marries White** looked at the

'problem' of 'mixed marriages'. **The Colony** was a rare example, which was designed to, and

did indeed, access Black people directly so that their views on Britain could be expressed (a

railway signalman from St.Kitts, a bus conductor from Jamaica, a nurse from Barbados and a

family of singers from Trinidad).

Black Marries White was more explicit in structuring its material for dramatic effect and in

setting up Black and White as necessarily conflictual. The documentary began with a church-

scene, cut to a glowing, White bride and then cut to her Black husband-to-be. Set up as a

shock-revelation, the vicar then warned them that this was "socially not the accepted custom"

and that "by taking the marriage vows, you have crossed the last barrier." Audiences were then

shown the epic documentary title over the image of the wedding - 'Black Marries White: The

Last Barrier'. The documentary introduced a series of interviews with inter-racial couples and

their parents. The White parents were depicted in 'ordinary' situations (e.g. the mother peeling

potatoes) and generally shown as reasonable and coping as well as possible 'under the

circumstances'. There were some reiterations of common racist assumptions, mostly relating

to notions of Black amorality (e.g. they "have children running around with no names"). One concerned mother said:

> I always thought my girl would be a good girl and marry a White man and
>
> settle down and be happy, but instead of that she's turned the other way
>
> because of the coloured people turning her head by saying if she went to
>
> Jamaica, she wouldn't have to do any work, would have servants...and
>
> would be able to lay around all day.

We have already seen how some of the key incongruities in relation to television's approach to race had developed in actuality programming by the 1960s. In the first place, Black people in Britain (both in terms of audience and within the documentary text itself) were referred to and spoken about, but never spoken to (apart from in specific Black programmes). This made the democratic impulse of a lot of early race-related documentary work necessarily contradictory, because in spite of the fact that much of it was arguing the case for universality and tolerance of cultural differences, the very language in which it spoke and the modes of address selected, excluded Black people from its concept of 'nationhood'. The classic liberal technique of *talking on behalf of* 'the victims' while simultaneously arguing that they are silenced, marginalised and denied access, was a key point of contradiction in the social-democratic discourse of many of these early programmes. In relation to terms of address, for example, Black people were overwhelmingly referred to as 'they' and not 'us'. The social documentary's incorporative strategy of locating its assumed (White) audience *inside* the society it spoke of, left the Black-British social referent and viewer in an ambiguous position in relation to the text's spatial framework and indeed, to British society. This bias was to continue well into the 1960s. Llew Gardner opened one edition of the studio discussion programme, **This Week (Racial Discrimination,** Tx:20.4.67) with this introduction, "Good evening. I'm White. Most of you

watching this programme are also White, which the way things are in this country is fortunate for us." Gardner turned to an Asian studio-guest and said, "I would like to ask Mr Nandy what it's like to be a coloured man living in this country of ours?" Social Whiteness was always assumed to be and constructed as the norm, and Whiteness (or - what was much the same thing - to appear to have no 'obvious' race) was treated as an inevitable privilege compared to 'Black disadvantage'. The discourse was constructed around an imagined binary 'ours' and 'theirs', 'us' and 'them', which made the general liberal discourse around 'race' appear both clumsy and confused. The second major contradiction was that, despite their obvious liberal intents, many of these documentary discourses around race were already working within a framework which defined ethnic minorities as a social problem. Rather than addressing the politics of racism, they tended to construct Black people and the issues they faced as the 'social problem' or simply reduced them to 'administrative issues' (Scannell, 1979:106). Later on, such 'loopholes' in the early documentary style were to be manipulated in verifiably shrewd and persuasive ways by those with less reformist objectives.

a) Squeezing Out the Reformist Agenda

1954 (Camden) and 1958 (Nottingham and Notting Hill) had seen clear expression of social hostility directed at Black people, putting the 'official goodwill' between Britain and its new Black immigrants under significant strain (Barry in Twitchin, 1988). But the context within which these uprisings were read and the responses they provoked at the time (both within Black and White communities), although comparable, were quite different, from the impact of those to follow later (see Chapter 3). There was still a dominant sense amongst many Black immigrants that despite - or even because of - the watershed events of 1958, the general liberal 'tolerance' towards race and immigration would increase; that 'common-sense' would realise

that Black people were being discriminated against. But during the 1960s, television social

documentary began to take on unprecedented tones of hostility and fear in relation to the Black

subject - representing a general shift in the way 'Blackness' had generically come to be

understood. As Sivanandan explains, 'a common language developed...and its fundamental

assumptions established. Blacks were the problem; fewer blacks made for better race relations;

immigration control was the answer; social control would follow'. In *Race, Class and the State*,

Sivanandan goes on to explain that the emphasis shifted, 'From immigration control to

"induced repatriation", and 'from a rationale of exploitation to a rationale for repatriation'

(Sivanandan, 1982:99).

The libertarian resolve behind many of the earlier texts now slowly began to be squeezed out,

or at the very least, was not pronounced so obviously. Various discussion programmes subtly

turned the emphasis from the 'disadvantage' which Black people faced, to the 'problem of the

immigrant'. **Racial Discrimination (This Week)** (Tx:20.4.67), for example, showed

'ordinary' Black people speaking of discrimination, but they were set up alongside a number of

White 'experts'. Thus, Martin Jukes representing the Engineering Employers Federation spoke

of the "difficulty in introducing coloured workers into factories." Another 'specialist' argued,

"A lot is said to be prejudice that is nothing of the kind." And the Chairman of the Race

Relations Board, Henry Bonham Carter, reassured the viewer, "Perhaps it is worth

remembering that things aren't as bad in this country as they are in some other countries."

Whilst the strain between principles of equity and difference were implicit within the

discourses of social democracy up to the mid-1960s, thereafter, the documentary project

became increasingly motivated towards representing the Black presence or Black-Britishness

as intrinsically problematic *for* White people. What became more and more apparent during the

1960s was that Black people, rather than simply being represented as the innocent 'victims' of

a colour bar and racial discrimination, were now being depicted as the ones causing trouble for

an otherwise smooth-running British way of life. The myth of a comfortable and affluent

status quo in the 1950s and larger part of the 1960s, had been served well by the image of

'good race relations', but when deep-seated problems (unemployment, industrial decline, poor

labour relations) within the British economy became more obvious in the late-1960s (see Hall

et al, 1978, 1983), the rhetoric of consensus and optimism became difficult to support - and

Black people began to be popularly understood as a reason for the decline in the 'state of the

nation' (see Chapter 1).

b) CASE STUDY 2: The Classic Social Problem Discourse
This Week: The Negro Next Door (1965)

The public affairs documentary series **This Week** (A-RTV, 1956-68, Thames TV/ITV, 1968-)

was broadcast under the press slogan 'A window on the world behind the headlines.' It aimed

to 'pad out' existing news information and explore a chosen topical issue in depth. **The Negro**

Next Door (Tx:19.8.65) edition investigated how White people felt about having 'Negroes'

living near to them (note Griffiths' campaign-slogan the year before, "If you want a nigger

neighbour, Vote Labour"). Referring back to De Nitto's categories, **The Negro Next Door**

represented a critical shift from the documentary of social *description* (as in **The Colony**) and

social *criticism* (as in **Has Britain A Colour Bar?**) to the documentary of social *protest* -

although here it was not a colour bar or racial discrimination that was 'inducing outrage' as

much as the 'problem' of Black people. The social protest here was weighted *against* a Black

presence. The documentary (which began with the scene of Black children playing in the street

- with not a parent in sight) coercively rationalised racist behaviour. The commentary set the

agenda from the outset:

In a street like Roseville Terrace Leeds...neighbours are important. You can't

escape them, you're always aware of them. For fifty years the people living

here have learnt to cope with the problem of proximity. The walls are thin,

the lavatory is outside. In the past five years, the problem has taken on a new

meaning. Now the people of Roseville Terrace have Negroes for neighbours.

Today, 15 of the 53 houses in this street have coloured families in them and

for the people next door, this is a new and sometimes bewildering experience.

Ten years ago, there were hardly any coloured people in Leeds. Today there

are 9000.

Just from this opening address the bias of the text is identifiable. Firstly, it was assumed that

the problem of poor living conditions would be amplified by the presence of Black neighbours.

The residents of Roseville Terrace, we were told, already had to suffer with thin walls etc., but

now "the problem has taken on a new meaning" with the "Negroes for neighbours." This was

posed as a crisis situation, firmly located within a problem-oriented discourse. Secondly, the

audience was encouraged, from the outset, to read 'the problem' from a White perspective, so

that the emotionality resided exclusively with the White neighbours. It was implied that the

local history, tradition and 'status quo' of White neighbourhoods were being disrupted by the

presence of Black people - 'the indigenous population' troubled by 'the newcomers.' Thirdly,

there was a focus on statistics and numbers with the implication that the rise in numbers (from

"hardly any" to 9000) in itself denoted crisis.

The Negro Next Door firmly located its 'investigation' in a problem-oriented dramatic

discourse, which it loosely structured in three parts: the first, looked at the problem from the

White neighbours' perspective; the second, although far more abbreviated, looked at it from the

Black neighbours' perspective; and the third, brought the two groups together in an attempt to resolve 'the problem'. In this sense, the text was instinctively reformist (wanting to resolve and improve the situation), but, I would argue, it structured this in such a way as to locate Black people as the ones in need of 'rehabilitation'. Furthermore, it legitimised White people's anxiety and deliberately set up a framework of conflict. The following extract lays out the three stages of the documentary:

Act One - The White neighbours' opinion:

The Negro Next Door presented two detailed interviews with White, female residents.
Interviewee 1:

Interviewer: How did she feel when her coloured neighbours first arrived?

Respondent: "Oh, I didn't bother, because they didn't bother me because they were at the bottom of the street and we didn't see them so much. It was when they began to move in greater numbers we began to get people with perhaps anything from five to ten people living in them that you noticed them then. They started carrying on, you know?"

(No reply from interviewer - assumption that we do know what she means)

Respondent: "They wouldn't bother me if they lived next door as long as they behaved in an orderly manner...As long as they live a decent life, live the same as I try to do. They don't, they're dirty. They don't clean their houses and things like we do...Since they've come near us, we've had mice and things...If you don't clean the houses you get other types of vermin...They won't speak to you if you speak to them...If you say 'hello' to them, they think you're barmy...they are the ones that are stand-offish."

Interviewer: And would she knock on the door of a 'coloured' neighbour?

Respondent: "I don't know if I'd have the courage. I'd probably be thinking they'd be looking

at me...I may be a little scared. I'd probably think that once the door's been shut on me I'll be

shipped off in the White slave trade."

Interviewee 2:

Respondent: "It was the thought of something being there...They didn't keep the children

clean, they just didn't know how to cope...They're primitive to me."

Interviewer: And how does her Mother feel about Black people living so close to her

daughter?

Respondent: "Well she reads in the papers about them. They don't think nothing about

bringing a knife out, if they can't get the better of you, they'll flick a knife on you...It's the

thought they're going to be violent with you."

Despite the fact that, between them, the interviewees blatantly displayed their racist fears

about Black people based on a series of stereotypical attributes (i.e. as violent, dirty,

unhygienic, uncivilised, unwilling/unable to communicate and 'integrate', overpopulated,

unconcerned with their children's welfare and hygiene and ultimately as primitive/unable to

cope in 'civilised Western' society), the commentary made no attempt to unpack them or

challenge them. It simply continued, "For those two women, still perhaps confused and

uncertain, the obvious fears and myths are mixed up with their desire to be good Northern

Neighbours, to be Christian." At no point did the narrator (Desmond Wilcox) interject or

'correct' his interviewees.

<u>Act Two -The Black neighbours' opinion:</u>

In an attempt to 'balance out' the neighbour's opinion Wilcox also interviewed a set of Black

neighbours. He asked them, "Do you feel lonely, unhappy, as though it's not friendly enough?" to which they responded, "No", that there was no problem whatsoever. Wilcox proceeded to tell the Black woman (who was recovering from meningitis and seemed quite distraught) that the White people next door did not like her because, "They say your behaviour is different from theirs". He went on to ask whether they kept their house clean, whether they kept themselves clean and whether they made an effort with their White neighbours? They answered politely, without a bad word to say.

Act Three -The confrontation:

In the final part of **The Negro Next Door**, the two White women were brought into the Black woman's home to air their grievances. Although the White women admitted that their Black neighbour's house didn't now look that dirty, they argued, "they knew you [camera team] were here last night...anybody can get prepared." Despite Wilcox's weak liberal comment ("You don't look dirty to me") the framework of **The Negro Next Door** was such that the Black people, their homes and their behaviour were defined throughout as the problem; there to be judged by their White neighbours. The commentary did nothing to shift this focus on to the White neighbours' attitudes themselves. The final scene in the documentary was perhaps the most revealing in this respect. A White woman turned on Wilcox and asked him "Would you like to see your oldest daughter marry a coloured man?" The shot remained on the woman, so that the audience did not get to see Wilcox's expression. Wilcox remained silent. The woman looked at him and said "You would not. I'm reading your face like a book. No, you would not."

c) CASE STUDY 3: The 'Between Two Cultures' Thesis
Asian Teenagers (1968)

Another new approach in the social documentary was to work with the notion of the Black

social subject (usually Asian) experiencing a 'culture clash' or being 'between two cultures'.[14]

This theme located the Black social subject at a traumatic crossroads, somewhere between their

'new' British way of life and their other 'Black' one. As such, the 'social concern' began to

shift from the first generation of 'immigrants' to the second generation of Black youth in

Britain. Just as certain myths (such as those developed in **Has Britain A Colour Bar?, The**

Negro Next Door and **Black Marries White**) have developed around African-Caribbeans - as

disordered, unclean, amoral, corrupting, so a new set of popular myths established themselves

around Asians - as overly moral, oppressive (men)/oppressed (women), alien and confused.

The best example of this perhaps, was **Asian Teenagers** (BBC, Tx:3.12.68).[15]

One of the interesting things about **Asian Teenagers**, was how it organised itself around

classic stereotypes of 'Asianness' which have, since then, held an astonishing degree of

permanency in representations of British-Asians. First, there was the image of the 'ghetto' as

essentially regressive, insular and divisive. Thus the commentary stated, 'Six years in Southall,

Middlesex, sometimes called 'little India', has taught Rajish that *they*, the English, just don't

want to know about *us* the Asian teenagers." Southall therefore, was depicted as a training-

ground which harnessed bad race relations rather than being seen as a refuge *from* racism.

Nothing was said of why 'indigenous' White residents might have moved out because *they* had

a problem with Asian people. The second popular image was that of the arranged marriage as

the ultimate symbol of patriarchy and barbarity. The commentary stated, "Arranged marriages

are repugnant to most English people...Victorian is an apt description of Asian attitudes to

family life and Dickens would have understood why these Muslim girls work all hours in their

fathers' restaurant kitchen. It's every Indian and Pakistani's dream to have his own business."

Note here how the text fluctuated (in the same sentence) between focusing on a few Muslim girls working for their Father, to a general statement about what *every* Asian's dream is.

The third key image which could be found in **Asian Teenagers** was that of the 'culture clash' between English and Asian ways of living. Thus, the commentary stated, "They [Asian teenagers] live in two worlds. On the one hand, the traditional Asian disciplines of family life and on the other, the British permissive teen scene...How do they interpret these conflicting worlds?" Asian teenagers here were depicted as the troubled subjects facing conflict, turmoil and confusion because of their 'dual identity' located between two (conflicting) cultures. This third aspect was used in such a way as to divide the first and second generation British-Asians, with the older generation being more alien/Asian and their children as closer to a 'normal' British way of life. The interviewer (Jim Douglas Henry) asked the teenage British-Asians, "Your parents presumably don't think too highly of White people", "Only the youngsters educated here are equipped to move out of this closed world", "Do you think English people are dirty?", "Do you regard a woman as being an equal to a man, or as inferior, as a possession?", "Do you think there is anything you could give back or contribute to this country, apart from your work?" The fourth image was of Asian culture as sinister and exotic. While filming an Asian prayer ceremony, the commentary stated, "For the English neighbours, it's an odd kind of happening on an Autumn Sunday morning...the alien reforms of ritual, which could of course be mistaken for devil worship."

We can see then, that **Asian Teenagers** distinctly set up a culture clash/between two cultures thesis. In highlighting the cultural difference of a particular group (such as Asians), the focus

on British racism was once again deflected. Moreover, in focusing on the 'negative' aspects of

these cultural differences, the chosen racial group were assumed to contain and perpetuate their

own sets of social problems. A number of beliefs masked as 'common sense' circulated to

produce a number of narratives of convenience, which depicted Asians as aliens with peculiar

ways, and British racism as a natural and temporary reaction to the newness with which *they*

(the English) were faced. So while it was seen as a natural human reaction for White British

people to feel territorial about their country, norms and values, it was deemed odd and even

audacious that Black people should feel the same about what they held important in terms of

their tradition, culture and 'ways of life'. It was a case of universality (Whiteness) V

specificity (Blackness).

d) The Effects of Powell and Documenting the 'Immigration Crisis'

The dehumanisation of social representations of Black people became further magnified by the

late-1960s, when the question of numbers and immigration became increasingly central to

documenting the Black presence. In broad terms, the new politics of anti-immigration came, in

part, as a result of the gradual deconstruction of the social democratic post-war consensus

which followed a number of key social changes (such as unemployment, post-imperialism and

the end of the post-war boom). A medley of extreme views on British race relations

materialised, with the effect of unsettling the hold of 'the Centre'. This, in turn, undermined

the principles underpinning social democracy. As the clear demarcations of political alliances

became increasingly blurred, modern forms of neo-conservative populist venting began to

unfold, one of which was the anti-immigration bandwagon (see Mercer in Grossberg et al,

1992:424-449). The most notorious bearer of this movement was Enoch Powell. It should be

noted however, that in many discussions around immigration during the 1960s, it was generally

agreed by conservative and liberal thinkers alike that immigration control was a prerequisite to 'good race relations' (see Chapter 1). This logic was summed up most memorably by Roy Hattersley who argued, 'Without integration, limitation is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible' (Hattersley in Rose, 1969:229). The issue of numbers and internal/external flow was high on the political Right's agenda at the time, and whilst the liberal Left were keen to be seen to exercise cultural and racial sensitivity, they also appeared to be anxious to appease racist opinion in their own ranks and concerned about being publicly perceived as a 'soft touch' (hence the 1965 White Paper on Immigration). This confusion and ambivalence in liberal opinion was reproduced in the aspiration towards equilibrium in the social problem documentary. The ideology of anti-immigration was not, I would argue, simply relayed by television during the 1960s, but actively produced, elaborated and naturalised by it - especially in its 'non-fiction' programming.

Pre-Powell, the media had, as we have seen, generally restrained from tackling matters of race 'head on' and disassociated itself (albeit clumsily) from any 'extreme' views on race which the subjects in their documentary might have expressed (so that for example, the interviewer/narrator/camera would sit 'innocently' between a conflict situation which it had, in fact, set up). The more usual approach was what Stuart Hall has called 'inferential racism' (Hall, 1981:37); always starting from the premise of White superiority and tolerance and the assumption that Blacks were 'the problem'. Within this context, Powell was a maverick voice who, during the 1960s, influenced public awareness and approaches to 'race' in unprecedented ways, thus serving to radically disrupt the liberal consensus towards race (essentially based on tolerance) which had been apparent since the immediate post-war years. Powell (who had, in fact, been involved in recruiting Black workers from the Caribbean in the 1950s), paved the

way for the formation of new public narratives on race and national identity. In a set of

speeches delivered between 1961 and 1964, Powell reassured the British people that the

imperialist legacy was based on little more than myths developed in the 1880s (Mercer,

1994:307). Powell acknowledged the imaginary construction of 'race', while also playing on it

to develop a rhetoric based not on essentialist notions of difference, but on (White) Britain

Versus 'the Others'. This new populist and patriotic racism did not present itself as a

White/Black dichotomy, but as a matter of national pride/identity Vs. chaos, and consensus

Vs. conflict. The crisis was measured by Powell in the following terms: "In this country in

fifteen or twenty years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man"

(quoted in Seymour Ure, 1974:103). With its cultural rather than biological emphasis, Powell's

anti-Black rhetoric represented a new modality of racism.

A new tone of fear about the Black presence began to occupy many of the documentary

programmes of the period and this resulted in a marked emphasis on statistical data recording

the rise in numbers (this statistical bias also, of course, served to seal the integrity and 'truth-

value' of the documentary mode). **Race - A Question of Numbers?** (BBCTV) discussed

Asians in Britain in terms of how many offspring they bred and how repatriation[16] might be

the only solution given the increase in population which they would inevitably bring. An

edition of the week-nightly news magazine programme **Tonight** (BBCTV 1957-65, BBC1

1975-79), focused on the Blackburn Report which discussed the Black presence in terms of

rising numbers, overcrowding and ghettos. The preoccupation with numbers effectively

reinforced Powell-like fears of Britain being invaded. The BBC's 'Great Debate' **The**

Question of Immigration hosted by Robin Day, also constructed the debate in terms of

numbers, while privileging Enoch Powell's scare-mongering forecast of trouble. As Hall says

about the programme:

> You have simply to look at the programme with one set of questions in your
>
> mind: Here is a problem, defined as 'the problem of immigration'. What is
>
> it? How is it defined and constructed through the programme? What logic
>
> governs its definition? And where does that logic derive from?...The *logic* of
>
> the argument is 'immigrants=blacks=too many of them=send them home'.
>
> That is a racist logic. (Hall, 1981:46)

The 'numbercentric' approach to analysing race in television documentaries implied that the

increase in figures was *the* cause for concern and that immigration necessarily needed to be read

in terms of this problematic. Throughout this period, Enoch Powell courted the media, and

Powellite rhetoric and language - no matter how cryptic and politically complicated it could be

- began to have an important bearing both on societal attitudes towards race and on the

vernacular of British racism itself. Powell's inflammatory language seductively touched on,

released and intensified social fears and uncertainties related to 'race', change and 'otherness'.

The way Powell was allowed to operate, the prestige he assumed with the cachet of being a

Member of Parliament, and the adeptness with which he managed the media, remained

unparalleled. The respectability and legitimacy of Powell's parliamentary position at the time,

separated him from earlier, more marginal, anti-immigration 'extremists' such as Jordan and

Mosley.[17] (It is worth noting though, that Powell continued to be granted this legitimacy

during the 1970s election when his position went against that of Conservative Party policy,

making Powell a 'political force in his own right') (Layton-Henry, 1992:83.)

The blanket coverage of Powell across different media forms, especially following the infamous

'Rivers of Blood' speech which he delivered in Birmingham on 20 April, 1968 (two days

before the introduction of the second Race Relations Bill), pointed to a clear divide between those calling for Powell's dismissal from the shadow cabinet (Edward Heath sacked him following the April speech) and those proclaiming 'we back Powell'. Meanwhile, the media in general, presented itself as straddling the middle ground by merely relaying the views of a generally respected intellectual and Conservative politician to the public. Interestingly, while the infamous speech was only delivered before about 100 people, it is estimated (according to a Gallup poll) that 95% of the British adult population heard (selected parts of) the speech via the media. Hence, the role of the media itself in creating a crisis or 'moral panic' over the dangers of immigration, needs to be considered.[18] Of course, the impact of Powell's speech on Black Britons was seldom acknowledged by the media.[19] Many have since registered the damaging effect of the speech in which Powell, using the metaphor of 'the Tiber foaming with much blood', warned of the dangers of immigration.[20] The effects of Powellism could not only be witnessed on a political level, so that those politicians who saw Powell's views as a green light, now felt able to register *their* fears about Black immigration, but also in terms of the way many White Britons (who were being told by Powell that they were a silenced majority), now felt quite justified and determined to express their hostility towards a Black presence. To be 'with Enoch' simply became a matter of choice and Powell's views on race continued to be sought by the British media.

In 1969, London Weekend Television broadcast **The Great Debate - Enoch Powell and Trevor Huddleston** (LWT/ITV, Tx:12.10.69), a studio discussion between Enoch Powell, then MP for Wolverhampton South West and Dr. Trevor Huddleston, Bishop of Stepney (and committed anti-apartheid campaigner). Not only was Powell given the status of an expert, but his racist polemic was given a platform under the guise of a theological debate about notions of

good, evil and Christian value. Of course, Powell was essentially an academic (he had been a

Cambridge fellow and Greek professor in his early twenties) and spoke with intensity,

authority and, it would seem, a passioned reasoning. The televised debate showed how

Powell's nationalistic and exclusionary logic could be intellectualised so that his brand of

racism could be transformed into something peculiarly virtuous. In response to Huddleston's

view that "Your Christian duty must be the same as your duty in society," Powell argued that

one cannot always apply Christianity to reality and social action. According to his own

definition, Powell denied that he was a 'racialist' on **Frost on Friday** (LWT) in early 1969, but

agreed that he was "conscious of the differences between men and nations, some of which

intersect with races". In a much later interview for the BBC (1995), Powell asked, "What's

wrong with racism? Racism is the basis of national identity."

Interestingly, Powell located the media itself ("a tiny minority, with almost a monopoly hold

on the channels of communication, who...will resort to any device or extremity to blind both

themselves and others [to the reality of immigration]...") as one of the 'enemies within'

(Powell, 1969:300; my addition). Most of all, he condemned the media's apparent location at

'the centre' of a liberal consensus. And, not surprisingly, many of Powell's claims were, in

turn, criticised by sectors of the media (most notably by the liberal press) although television

(in keeping with its ethos of neutrality) tended to take on a largely non-evaluative position. It

never led the debate or noted the positive effects of immigration and by implicitly allowing

Powell to set the agenda, essentially accepted that immigration was innately problematic and

needed to be strictly controlled. By the late-1960s, the entire debate over race and immigration

had shifted from questions of injustice, housing, labour etc., to debates around the potential

threat of immigration - which it unremittingly treated as a Black issue - as a threat to 'our

national way of life'.[21]

Conclusion

The historical development of the documentary genre on British television and the context

within which modes of public communication were set and subsequently began to operate, are

particularly useful when tracing the shifting representational strategies of 'Blackness' and

'race'. This is partly because the codes of the rhetorical documentary style (liberal, social

problem discourses) have become the dominant mode through which 'race' has been read and

constructed on British television at large. With its emphasis on 'race and society', it is arguably

the early television documentary tradition which put the burden of sociology (what a Black

person brings to a text sociologically) onto the represented Black subject. Of course, we have

seen how 'race' itself was only an issue when Black people were in the frame or the subject of

the documentary. As such, the White documentary subjects, and for that matter, the White

members of the audience, were never asked or encouraged to think of themselves as also having

a racial identity, or as helping to construct 'the problem'.

Interestingly, these early documentary forms largely worked with a self-image of neutrality

and balance and of holding the 'middle ground' in documenting the Black experience and 'race

relations'. Paradoxically however, there was also no acknowledgement or space for criticism of

the fact that Black people were not granted the same representational treatment or access to

document their own experiences. There was simply no access for Black people to define the

public agenda themselves or have any control over the cultural apparatus. Moreover, those

'accessed voices' that there were included in some of these documentaries, while sometimes

Black, were not necessarily given a truly democratic or 'liberating' platform from which to

speak. Indeed, if we take the terms 'object' ('person or thing to which action or feeling is

directed') and 'subject' (theme of discussion or description or representation, matter to be

treated of or dealt with') to their strictest Oxford Dictionary definitions, then there is a thin

line between whether the Black people who appeared in these documentaries can be considered

as the objects or subjects of study. It is interesting to ask, then, what the *point* was of

including the Black supposed accessed voice when very little space was, in fact, granted for

them to break with the narrative authority of the documentarists (which was best maintained

through the didactic, mediatory commentary/interview-technique which so many of these

documentaries contained)? The Black neighbours in **The Negro Next Door**, for example, were

never given a chance to state their case in the same way as their White neighbours (with whom

audiences were encouraged to identify) but the 'democratic' structure of the text (of asking

'both sides') gave the illusion of balance. Similarly, 'ordinary' Blacks were often set against

White 'experts' who challenged that what the former had experienced was, in fact, 'racism'.

This double marginalisation of the Black social subject - as: one, the 'victim' of bigotry, racism

and intolerance; and two, of their own alienation and marginalisation within the race-related

documentary - was a key feature of the early Black-centred documentary. The void between

appearance and essence, the particular and the general, was often glossed over, with the

implication that a typical situation existed and was being simply 'recorded' by the programme.

Even in the generalist titles - like **Asian Teenagers, The Negro Next Door** and **Mixed**

Marriages (Tx:21.5.58; part of the **People in Trouble** series which looked at 'social

problems' such as stammering, illiterates, suicides, kleptomaniacs, ex-prisoners and polio) - we

were invited to assume that what we were seeing was typical. One of the most important

questions which we can ask, is where did the terms of these enquiries and debates start?

As well as always being done in the voice of somebody else, these texts were, as I have argued, unequivocally framed within the folklore of the Black problematic. Within its logic, Black people were the social referent to be explained *to* 'the (White) public' and their experience was almost always constructed within a 'social problem' narrative. As Hall notes, 'every word and image of such programmes are impregnated with unconscious racism because they are all predicated on the unstated and unrecognized assumption that *blacks* are the *source of the problem*' (Hall, 1981:37). Moreover, this prescription of trouble operated alongside and within liberal attempts to 'give Blacks a fair treatment'. Hall has reminded us though, that racism is not 'mutually exclusive of the liberal consensus' but, in fact, quite often part of it (Hall, 1981:37). Talking about his film **Riots and Rumours of Riots** (1981), which examined the history of immigration from the Caribbean between World War II and the Notting Hill riots of 1958, Imruh Bakari argues that it, 'served the purpose of pulling together liberal and conservative views about immigration...they all amounted to the same thing; these people must be stopped, numbers are a problem and they are a hindrance to good community...these people must be contained in some way ' (Bakari, interview with Malik, 10.12.96). While I would contest that 'they all amount to the same thing', I would also suggest that the liberal impulse did not guarantee a verifiably balanced text, eliminate racist undertones or indeed, obstruct racist readings (see Chapter 10). The active role of television in mediating how 'race' came to be framed, particularly in these discourses of truth, was central in how (anti) 'Blackness' subsequently came to be articulated and 'claimed' (see Chapters 1 and 3). The impact of institutional classifications of 'race' in distinct terms and the identification of it as an Issue worthy of documentary intervention in the interests of 'the public' and of public communication, must be seen as a powerful force in subsequent common-sense notions around Black people in British society.

NOTES

[1] My reference to documentary includes the dramatized documentary, the actuality documentary and the magazine documentary (Bell in Corner, 1986).

[2] Very early examples include **Buy Your Own Cherries**, (UK, 1904) and **Rescued By Rover** (UK, 1905). Following that, the most popular entertainment cinema included the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Alexander Korda.

[3] The BBC TV Schools service was set up in September 1957 and began with a programme called **Living in the Commonwealth**.

[4] Portable magnetic tape recorders began to be used by the BBC in the 1950s and unlike the disc recording which it replaced, tape recorded sound could be relatively precisely edited.

[5] This apathy towards television was perfectly highlighted when transmission stopped for WW2 halfway through a Mickey Mouse cartoon with no announcement (Briggs, 1979).

[6] In 1948, the Director-General, Sir William Haley, resolutely declared that, 'We are citizens of a Christian country, and the BBC - an institution set up by the State - bases its policy upon a positive attitude towards the Christian values...It seeks to safeguard those values and to foster acceptance of them' (quoted in Edward Buscombe 'Broadcasting from Above' *Screen Education*, Winter 1980/1).

[7] This splitting of 'social' and 'political' documentary modes was partly a result of the cautious environment of the early BBC which arguably meant that it avoided the coverage of contentious, provocative or overtly political subjects.

[8] The **Black and White in Colour** archive interviews are unedited versions of the interviews conducted as part of the BFI's Black and White in Colour1992 project.

[9] All those parts of the extract in italics are direct quotes from the Rough Outline Treatment; everything else is my addition.

[10] The BBC's research notes for the programme stated, 'The white man's prejudice seems to be in inverse ratio to his education' (Peter Stone, 16.12.54).

[11] During the 1950s, the only other channels of public information related to the home countries of those who had migrated to Britain from South Asia, were Asian newspapers or short-wave radio broadcasts such as All India Radio or Air Pak. By the 1960s, there were 9 Asian-language weekly newspapers (with a total circulation of 70,000) and one English-language periodical, *India Weekly*.

[12] Although we cannot assume that the views of programme-makers and politicians were interchangeable at this time, it is worth noting what the 'official' political line was on the question of 'immigration/integration'. On 23 May 1966, Roy Jenkins (then Labour Home Secretary) described liberal pluralist and integration ideals as 'not a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (Jenkins in Rose, 1969:25).

[13] Donnellan was a valued, neo-Marxist Birmingham-based BBC documentarist and was later asked to leave the BBC along with Charles Parker. Donnellan was a pioneer of 'ballad documentary'.There were a number of other important 'reformist' documentaries at this time including a **Tonight** edition entitled 'West Indians' (1963, Dir: Jack Gold) which showed the experiences of a West Indian man who faced discrimination in London and juxtaposed this with his visit to a West Indies Vs. England cricket-match. Also note the **World In Action** edition 'Smethwick' (Tx:17.11.64) about 'racial problems in Britain'.

[14] The 'between two cultures' thesis has also been applied within academic race relations analysis. For examples, see Marie Gillespie (1993) The Mahabharata: from Sanskrit to sacred soap in D.Buckingham Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media, Man Uni Press; Catherine Bailey 'Conflict, Continuity and Change: Second Generation Asians' in Saifullah Khan (ed.) Minority Families in Britain (Macmillan, 1979); and Community Relations Commission (1978) Between Two Cultures: a Study in the relationships between generations in the Asian Community in Britain.

[15] **Asian Teenagers** was produced by Ivor Dunkerton, edited by Desmond Wilcox and Bill Morton; Dilip Hiro was the advisor and Jim Douglas Henry the reporter.

[16] In 1969, Heath, having sacked Powell from the Shadow Cabinet, urged that immigration needed to be 'severely curtailed' and that those who wished to return to their countries of origin should 'receive assisted passage from public funds'.

[17] Oswald Mosley who had led the British fascists during the 1930s, used the racial tension in Notting Hill during the 1950s to try and relaunch his career. But in the 1959 General Election he took just 2,000 votes and retired.

[18] Although the 'Rivers of Blood' speech was not recorded for television, his words were recounted time and time again in the press and in news and current affairs programmes. For example, in one edition of **Panorama** entitled 'A Profile of Enoch Powell' (BBC, Tx:2.12.68).

[19] One important exception here was an edition of the BBC social documentary series **One Pair of Eyes** (Tx:21.12.68) entitled 'One Black Englishman' in which author and poet Dom Moraes spoke of the effect which Powell's' 1968 speech had on him. The documentary was however, firmly located within the 'between two cultures' framework so that Moraes was represented as having 'chosen' Englishness, despite having witnessed racism ("I've made my choice of country and attitude"). A later edition in the series entitled 'Return as a Stranger' (Tx:17.10.70, produced by Anthony De Lotbiniere) saw Moraes return to India.

[20] Powell was also a master of the 'real-life' anecdote (although there was little hard evidence to support them). For example, he described excretia being pushed through White people's letter-boxes and "wide-grinning Pickaninnies" following tormented old White ladies and calling her "Racialist" (the only word, he explained, they could say in English). These tales highlighted how Powellite discourse was not always 'highbrow', but could also slip into a more populist and direct style of address.

[21] As a footnote, it should be noted that, following his death on 8 February1998, and to mark the 30th anniversary of the 'Rivers of Blood' speech, Channel 4 screened a mock trial entitled **The Trial of Enoch Powell** (LWT for C4, Tx:20.4.98) in which the central question was whether Powell was racist and whether he damaged British race relations. As well as starting from the assumption that Powell might not have been 'racist' (with no working agreement about what that term means), the programme simplified and undermined the political complexity and impact of Powell. For example, it failed to consider that Powell could have been a sophisticated and well-respected politician *and* racist, that opinion of him cannot be based solely on one speech but on a long-running campaign which was anti-immigration and supportive of repatriation, and assumed that the issue today continues to be one of Immigrants Vs. Powellism (when a large majority of Black people in Britain today were born here). With a few notable exceptions (Ekow Eshun, Billy Bragg), the programme also served as a forum for further racist opinion (e.g. from Gary Bushell and audience members). A Nation of Islam believer (Leo Muhammed) and news images from 1990 of anti-Rushdie Muslim protesters were held up as evidence that Enoch's prophecy of the dangerous effects of immigration were right. The 'verdict' of the programme was that 64% of the studio audience said that Powell was not a racist and did not damage race relations. Of course the programme provided 75 minutes of good entertainment, with Darcus Howe as a 'prosecutor' and a similarly self-assured 'defence team', but its delusions of grandeur and pretence at serious debate ultimately made it seriously trivial 'political TV'.

Chapter Three

Accessing the Black Voice in Actuality Programming from the 1970s to 1990s

Our lives have been transformed by the struggle of the margins to come into representation. (Stuart Hall, 1995:30)

I've seen the most lousy crap produced by certain channels written by Black persons, absolute substandard rubbish, concessionary tosh. (Farrukh Dhondy, interview with Malik, 1.6.96)

The aim of this chapter is to outline the history of Black access (cultural, employment and representational) to television, within the context of documentary programming. Although there are many aspects of continuity in terms of politics and themes between this chapter and the last (for example, the dominance of the social problem discourse), I would suggest that the end of the 1960s began to see the beginning of a different type of race politics in Britain. New political formations were not something which only happened *outside* of television, but were also quite explicitly played out *on-screen*. By the 1970s, television itself was being intensifyingly located at the centre of debates around race, and the impact, uses and powers of the medium were increasingly being noted (for example the UNESCO reports in, 1974, 1977, 1986) (see Chapter 1). There was, in general, the emergence of a better understanding of the relation between power and representation and the importance of television in defining agendas through the regulation of visibility. One clearly identifiable shift between the 1970s and the earlier period therefore, was a general 'opening out' of the medium - to audiences, new producers and unexplored modes of production. Thus, the word 'access' became central in

considerations of the medium's effects, as did what television as a (multi-ethnic) 'public sphere' really meant.[1] By the 1970s, the contestation over national identity had increasingly developed as a central political and social issue and as a preoccupation of emergent forms of representation. Notions of 'public service' also came under scrutiny in this period, and complaints about the responsibility of the medium in terms of what it was offering different sectors of British society were increasingly voiced. What also began to emerge, was a general probing into where television should locate itself in terms of balance.

The most significant outcome of this period with respect to our concerns, was the formation of specialist Black broadcasting units and multicultural programming (as distinct from the Immigrant programming which I referred to in the last chapter), which stemmed, to a large degree, from these debates around access and public service broadcasting during the 1970s and 1980s. In the main, this response was confined within the context of non-fiction output.[2] The access slots of the 1970s, the regional attempts to record Black community viewpoints towards the end of that decade, and the Black-targeted programmes screened on BBC2 and Channel 4 during the 1980s, all privileged the realist aesthetic. Given the dominance of the actuality mode in delineations of Blackness during this period, I want to outline aspects of this history and some of the debates around access, Black programming and the public sphere through my analysis of the 'race-related' documentary in the later period. I will do this both in general terms, and through the use of more detailed case studies which I think best exemplify the shifting directions of documentary discourse since the 1970s. The main aim of this chapter then, is to question to what extent the growth of Black access during the 1970s and 1980s penetrated and transformed the dominant textual strategies of representing race within documentary output.

The first section will focus on the development of access programming during the 1970s and look in some detail at the work of the BBC's Community Programmes Unit, out of which the first set of television access slots emerged. It will also signpost some key early texts which attempted to produce an alternative to the master-codes of what Jim Pines has called the 'official race-relations narrative' (Pines, 1988:29) which were best exemplified in the social problem discourse seen so frequently in the 1960s.[3] In Section 2, I will move on to look at the shifting institutional frameworks of the 1980s within which the Black voice was explicitly positioned on the agendas of broadcasting institutions. This will take us up to the 1990s which is the focus of the final section. Here, I will argue that notions of access have changed and that 'Black-centred' and 'Black issue-based' programmes have, in recent years, become a more prominent part of mainstream programming. But I will also argue that Blackness, to some extent, continues to be framed in relation to conflict and anxiety in television documentary programmes. Moreover, I will note how *new* moral panics in popular readings of race have emerged during the 1990s. In my conclusion, I shall briefly consider what the future holds in terms of access and targeted Black programming. As well as reviewing the current position of the multicultural departments, I will ask whether the move towards global modes of television, is likely to improve access opportunities and broaden the repertoire of Black documentary representations (although these debates will be covered more extensively in Chapters 9 and 10).

Section 1: Anti-Racist Interventions in Television during the 1970s

a) Balance, Access and Liberal Discourse

During the dominance of the three channel system, there were a number of documentary

programmes which dealt specifically with race-related issues. Many of these were historical documentaries such as **The Fight Against Slavery** (1975) and **The Black Man in Britain** (1974), but the standard documentary series often focused on 'race relations' within the contemporary British context. These tended, like the earlier set of documentaries in the 1950s and 1960s, to report on injustice or conflict in relation to 'race'. **World in Action** for example, examined the growth of right-wing militancy, the Monday Club and the National Front; **Credo** reported on the presence of East End Asians; and **Breaking Point** examined the relationship between Black people and the police. What many of these documentaries also shared with earlier documentary texts, was a liberal rationale which urged a 'balanced' view on 'race'. Others however, such as **Divide and Rule - Never** (1978), a documentary made by the Newsreel Collective, were more explicit in registering their critiques of racism, the British social structure and police prejudice, and located the rise of Anti-Nazi organisations such as Rock Against Racism within the specific context of 1970s Britain.

Alan Horrox, who worked on a four-part series on race, **Our People** (Thames TV, Tx:11.1-22.2.79), suggests that the 1970s brought a number of 'race-related' programmes which worked against 'a growing conservatism at every level of programming in television'. At the time he argued that, 'when mass media, like society, are turning to the right, here is an area of programming that, it could be argued, is showing signs of going in the opposite direction (Horrox, 1979:83). Perhaps the most important words in this sentence are 'showing signs of', for the documentary mode continued to display its democratic sensibilities by safeguarding the 'victims' of discrimination whilst also demonstrating the moral integrity of its expurgators (i.e. racist values were disassociated from the documentarist and from television in general). **Our People** was, according to Horrox, a series aimed at a 'swayable' audience, 'the great number of

people in the 'middle ground', for whom racism is part of everyday culture, and who are open

to accepting racist arguments and explanations if no better alternative seems available' (ibid).

The series, therefore, was aimed at those who were open to changing their attitudes towards

race. **Our People** combined statistics, historical information and factual source information to

examine the institutional racism of immigrant laws; racial discrimination in housing,

employment and education; the history of imperialism and the call for immigrant labour. It also

looked at the recent increase in racist attacks and the response of anti-racist organisations.

With such a broad brief, Horrox admits that issues like the politics of the systematic lack of

development in Third World countries (the way in which neo-colonialism operates by

maintaining and perpetuating other countries' 'underdevelopment'), could not be explained in

much detail and that the series did leave ample space for a racist counter-logic to be applied

(Horrox, 1979:86). The problem of course, was of how to 're-educate' a majority, mass

audience about race and racism. As Stuart Hall noted in relation to the CARM **Open Door**

programme, **It Ain't Half Racist, Mum** (BBC2, Tx:1.3.79, 4.3.79):

> ...I'm afraid that, to enter the struggle on this popular level is a quite different
>
> order of political task from that of confirming the already-confirmed views of
>
> the converted. It means struggling over the muddy and confused middle-
>
> ground: the ground where Powellism, Thatcherism and the National Front
>
> have, in recent years, made such remarkable headway. (Hall, 1981:48)

It bears repetition that audiences had also grown accustomed to television's preponderant

attitudes on matters of race in its actuality programming: a position which was not only

promoted as and widely assumed to be independent, liberal and centrist, but which also framed

Black people as a social problem and as essentially marginal from British society. Furthermore,

television continued to be *the* principal medium which represented British race relations.

During the 1970s, many of those involved in media research, such as the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), the Glasgow Media Group and the Campaign Against Racism in the Media (CARM), began to debate the issue of 'agenda setting', particularly in the context of news and current affairs reports on race (for more on this, see Chapters 1 and 4). Indeed, by the mid-1970s, the media in general, began to be recognised by many as an active player in the formation of social attitudes. The neutral status which had traditionally been ascribed to 'non-fiction' texts gradually began to be eroded. The canon became increasingly seen as itself subjective and accusations of bias were more readily applied.[4] Partially in response to this, some broadcasting companies during the 1970s began to recognise the need for a space where more excluded sectors of society could express their viewpoints.

Access television developed as a 'non-fiction' initiative serving to express the actual lived reality or opinions of an individual/group. The premise of access TV was, in fact, an extension of the liberal consensus of British broadcasting and was used to acknowledge criticisms that (despite the existence of a dominant public service ethos), television was tightly controlled and actively manipulated. Rather than simply criticising the existing bias, many now called for the active participation of all those who wanted to make the media theirs and get ' a slice of the cake'. As Hans Magnus Enzensburger argued, 'The question is...not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them. A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator' (Enzensburger in McQuail, 1972:107). It was increasingly realised that meanings could only be shared by common access to language, and that attaining access to television (whose language was a key representational system) was essential if one wanted to be involved in the process of producing culture and its meanings (Hall, 1997:1).

Not all access, however, worked in the same way. Robin Gutch's definition of three modes of access: 'hands-on' access, 'mediated' access and 'representative' access can usefully be applied to our understanding of the different modes of 'access television' (Gutch, 1984:124). Gutch defines 'hands-on' access as 'the purist model', where accessees are briefly nurtured into using technology before going on to control the means of production in 'their' programme (e.g. the community video sector). He describes the 'mediated' access approach meanwhile, as bringing accessees and professional broadcasters together (e.g. BBC's **Open Door**), while the 'representative' access approach is where professional programme-makers are given a slot to make programmes from an alternative viewpoint or on an otherwise misrepresented/neglected issue (e.g. Channel 4's **Eleventh Hour**). Gutch argues that, in general, the 'discursive confusion which surrounds the term 'access'...results from the mythology which has successfully allowed the television institutions to define 'access' as a genre within the television mix rather than as an alternative mode of production which questions mainstream television production...' (Gutch, 1984:124). At the same time, 'access' television is, in essence, a genre defined according to its production process rather than its content; and as such, is assumed to employ a mode of production that is quite different from that of 'non-access' TV. With access TV comes the notion of an opinionated, amateurish and ultimately subjective text, so that its truth-value, objectivity and reliability is immediately downgraded (while TV in the hands of the self-proclaimed 'professionals' maintains its position as neutral and consensus-based). Thus, the notional difference of 'access' and 'non-access' TV is such that, objective and truthful television is alive and well (and the norm) on our screens in the form of 'non-access' TV. I would add that the ideological premise of access TV has been set up as revelatory, but the structured production process and the way in which the texts are often

mediated by the professionals, has sometimes prevented them from being so. Thus, the

question of *how* alternative 'access' is allowed to be needs to be considered.

b) CASE STUDY 1: Open Door and Other Interruptive Strategies

The BBC's Community Programme Unit was set up in 1972. Influenced by the rise of access

work in Canada and the US, it aimed, according to Mike Fentiman who headed the unit in the

1970s, to 'give airtime to the unheard, the rarely heard, the socially inarticulate and so on'

(quoted in Dovey, 1993:164). The first programme to come out of the Unit was **Open Door**

(subsequently **Open Space**) which was broadcast on BBC TV from Spring 1973. Access TV

also had its roots in BBC Local Radio of the mid-1970s. Specific slots such as **Black**

Londoners were opened out to the public who were, in turn, invited to make programmes

from a 'community' viewpoint. Carl Gardner points out, however, that the issue of access lays

open the paternalism of that which is supposed to be a public service institution. '"Access" is

something that the BBC gives to other people, despite being itself a public service paid for by

our money' (Gardner, 1979b:19).

Access was not something which was simply awarded to those hitherto under-represented or

denied voice but also to those who had previously been thought too contentious or

provocative to be (explicitly) granted airtime on British television. Powell's reputable

parliamentary position, as I argued in the last chapter, validated his 'official' media space, but

by the 1970s new 'extreme voices' could be heard in the name of accessing *all* members of the

TV nation. This exposed some of the ambiguities at the heart of the notion of 'access'. Thus, an

edition of the **Tonight** programme featured KKK member, David Duke, and various racist

organisations insisted on free publicity in the name of 'media democracy'. One such instance

was an edition of **Open Door** entitled 'British Campaign To Stop Immigration' (Tx:28.2.76).

It began, "This is a film about race. That does not mean that this is a film about hatred". It

subsequently embarked on a racist project which openly rested on the foundations of anti-

immigration thought: too many people; insufficient facilities for Whites as it is; Asians not

following 'our' rules (Asians were repeatedly shown gambling and drinking in open spaces and

always filmed in large numbers); new (Black) immigrants being less tolerable than German and

East European ones because they do not come from 'Westernised society'; Asians as unclean

and causing squalor, decay and rat infestation, and so on. Interestingly, the British Campaign

To Stop Immigration also used this moment of access to argue how *they* were otherwise

silenced. Thus, we saw one man explain how 'his area' had been taken over by immigrants.

Mid-polemic, the words 'Censored - By Race Relations Act' were sprawled across the screen,

implying that the effects of a liberal consensus were indeed a conspiracy of silence (which

Powell had long ago identified in the media). Although this edition of **Open Door** was made in

the name of access, it could be argued that the problem with granting space to overtly racist

organisations was that they had not been a silenced or under-represented group which had been

denied access on mainstream television. Furthermore, their views were not 'balanced' - but

explicitly anti-Black. It was television's self-positioning in the so-called 'neutral' centre of

(what it defined as) the 'extremes' that needs to be noted here.[5]

The tangled politics around the making of another edition of the **Open Door** slot, **It Ain't**

Half Racist, Mum (Tx:1.3.79, 4.3.79), perfectly highlighted the ambiguities of access in terms

of its definition and function. **It Ain't Half Racist, Mum** was the first (mediated) access slot

to not only address the question of Black representation, but also to critically assess notions

of balance within televisual output. Made by The Campaign Against Racism in The Media

(CARM), it was 'a programme about the media and racism, on the media, against the media' (Hall, 1981:47). By showing examples from mainstream television programmings' depictions of race, Stuart Hall goes on to suggest that CARM aimed 'to make the media, for once, 'speak' against the media's dominant practice, and thus reveal something about how they normally function'. According to some of those involved in making the programme however, the BBC proved apprehensive about being questioned in their time (so to speak) and using what they saw as their apparatus (see Gardner, 1979a, 1979b). Hall, who co-presented the programme with Maggie Stead, argues that one of the problems that the BBC had with the programme was that it, 'undermined their professional credentials by suggesting that they had been partisan where they were supposed to be balanced and impartial. It was an affront to the liberal consensus and self-image which prevails within broadcasting' (Hall, 1981:37).

Other **Open Door** programmes such as **Black Teachers**, continued to effectively criticise institutional (in this case, educational) racism. Organisations such as The Southall Defence Committee also used the access slot to 'pad out' information and reeducate people about the politics of a specific incident. **Southall On Trial** (Tx:22.9.79) analysed, from a critical perspective, the events surrounding the disturbances in Southall in 1979 which resulted in Blair Peach's murder. The programme-makers used direct testimonies, maps, photographic evidence and commentary to retell the story of exactly why so many had protested about the fact that a public space (Ealing Town Hall) had been given to an overtly racist body (The National Front), and of why the peaceful protest had ended in violence (see Chapter 1). They offered an alternative viewpoint to the 'official' news coverage of the incident, by emphasising the use of police brutality and unfair legal procedures which produced what one lawyer in the programme called, "one of the judicial scandals of the century". As such, the programme problematised

institutions such as the law, the police and the media, rather than depicting 'race' or 'Blackness' as the source of 'the problem'.

A key hurdle which many producers of these interventions had to face, was that they were seen (by those so used to dominant readings of race in the current of non-fiction texts) as necessarily 'biased' and 'partial'. This judgment was further enhanced by the openly declared 'subjective' stance that access programming was required to adopt. Such is the power and effect of the dominant consensus constructed by popular representations of race, that even those programmes designed to dismantle 'untruths', are often subsequently perceived as untruthful themselves. The power of decades of reductionist images of Blackness represented as and taken as 'truth', although often based on little more than easily palatable myths, has historically served to locate the majority of anti-racist strategies not only as transgressive but as essentially preferential. The active role of the television institutions themselves in deciding what is deemed expedient, too provocative or unacceptably opinionated can be traced throughout the medium's history. But the late-1970s and early-1980s in particular, witnessed television's continued attempt to tip-toe carefully around *certain* opinions on race. This was especially noticeable in the struggle that many emerging Black documentarists were beginning to have with broadcasters. Henry Martin's film **Grove Music** (1981), although it had an obvious focus on music and the emerging reggae sound of Black-British bands, also warned of racial unrest. Although bought by Channel 4, once the riots did in fact start in 1981, Martin had to fight against the decision to ban the film. When it did eventually come to screen (it stayed on a shelf for three years) it was aired late at night with no mention in the daytime schedules or to Martin himself until 7 O'clock that evening. Similar struggles were experienced by the Black independent workshop, Ceddo, with their film **The People's Account** (Dir:

Milton Bryan, 1986). The film, which was in fact banned by Channel 4, focused on the

uprisings of 1985 and particularly on the views of many in the Broadwater Farm Community.

One significant alternative to mainstream documentary representations of British race

relations, which did manage to get its way on to screen was the four-part series **Struggles For**

Black Community (Channel 4, Tx:15/22/29.8.84, 5.9.84), which was directed by Colin

Prescod (see film chapter for more on 'alternative' narratives of race relations).

Institutional evasion tactics were even more explicitly played out with David Koff's film

Blacks Britannica (US, 1979). Although the independent production was made for the US

(WGBH-Boston), it was actually based on the Black-British experience and Britain's colonial

heritage. As part of an American series which aimed to access new viewpoints, **Blacks**

Britannica set out, as much as possible, to depict Britain through the eyes of members of the

Black-British community itself. The film was editorially controlled by a group of mainly Black

radicals and featured previously unrecorded testimonies and analyses of the politics of Black

Britain. Resting between Latin-American and European traditions of political filmmaking, it

also opened up new ways of approaching the documentary form. Despite these breakthroughs,

WGBH was pressurised to put out a re-edited version of the film by those who were less than

happy with what they saw as a damaging critique of Britain's race relations record (the BBC

and CRE were involved in the dispute). A court battle ensued in the States with Koff et al.

contesting directors' copyright since they were dissatisfied with the altered version of the film.

As Colin Prescod recounts, 'The whole thing was about denying what the film was saying,

which was that things are very bad; the measure of how bad they are is their youth and the

measure of how bad it is for the youth is that they are about to explode... In 1982 Channel 4

purchased a copy but it has never been shown...' (Prescod, interview with Malik, 19.11.96).

When the riots did happen in 1981, WGBH withdrew their case and said they would destroy

their version of the film. The impact of the original version of the documentary (it played to

packed houses in venues such as The Other Cinema in London and various community

centres) was immense. What became apparent in this encounter between a number of

overlapping constituencies of tastes, interests and politics, was that the media space which

Black people could potentially occupy, although highly regulated, had to be deemed as a

significant site of struggle.

Section 2: The Institutionalisation of the Black Voice on Television

a) Diversifying the 'Public Service' Ideal

Television was to become a central player in articulations of the shifting political discourses

around race and nation. This was most evident in the reconceptualisation of what broadcasting

institutions took 'the British public' to mean; a shift from an undifferentiated mass to a

number of different identifiable groups making up a whole nation. Up until the 1970s, the

liberal consensus around the ideal of 'public service television' was seen as a satisfactory all-

encompassing approach which allowed broadcasters to address all members of the British

public in much the same way. The fact that public service broadcasting was based, in part, on

the principle of universality - of payment, access, geography and appeal - meant that, in

theory, no British citizen should have been disenfranchised from the medium (see Chapter

1/Section 2). By the latter part of the 1970s however, it was clear to many sectors of society,

that the job simply was not being done under the terms of this directive and the limited notions

of universal citizenship gradually began to give way to a more pluralised and hybridised

conception of British society.

Television, as we began to see in the last chapter, was an active player in constructing notions

of 'Blackness', not only in terms of the cultural codes and language with which it defined 'it',

but also in terms of categorising Asians and African-Caribbeans as a distinct group

('Immigrants', 'Coloured'). Since 'the Black community' did not live as a homogeneous entity,

television - along with other forms of media and arts (music, literature, radio, the press) -

became a central medium in producing and disseminating the various meanings and ideologies

that came to be associated with 'Blackness'. By the 1980s, re-articulations of the meaning of

Black were increasingly being shaped by the radical efforts and social antagonisms articulated

by many of those within the new ethnic communities so that, as the Black subject began to

gain public voice in the late-1970s, so the categories of 'Immigrant' and 'Coloured' were

transformed into a new Afro-Asian public and political collectivity called 'Black' (see Chapter

1). These shifting meanings were therefore explicitly defined and circulated within and across

different representational systems.

It was generally agreed that an improvement in the provision of ethnic minority programming

would encourage harmonious race relations (Annan Report, HMSO, 1977). The CRE

responded to the Government's White Paper on Broadcasting by arguing that:

> Good race relations and equality of opportunity in Britain depend on the
>
> creation of understanding between ethnic minorities and the majority
>
> community. The way the press and broadcasting media report issues
>
> pertaining to ethnic minorities and race relations and the extent to which
>
> ethnic minorities are given the opportunity to use these channels to obtain
>
> information, entertainment, education and satisfaction is of crucial importance
>
> in achieving this understanding. This applies to ethnic minorities from the
>
> New Commonwealth as well as others. (HMSO, 1979)[6]

Despite Britain's unique philosophy of public service broadcasting, it was also apparent that

it was trailing behind many other countries in its provision of ethnic minority programming.[7]

As we have seen, Black programming *per se* had never really been a major issue for

broadcasters during the three channel system, apart from 'integration shows' such as **Asian**

Club in the mid-1950s. Additionally, television in particular had failed to match the ethnic

provisions and specialist formats of other media (mainly the press and radio).[8] At the same

time, surveys revealed that television was the most popular medium for Black audiences

(Anwar and Shang, 1982).[9] There was no (and continues to be no) legal obligation for

television companies (public or private) to cater for ethnic minorities. (Apart from Channel 4's

targeted mandate, the other channels merely have clauses in their policy documents indicating a

'common-sense' approach to the treatment of race on-screen.)[10]

The first acknowledgement that different communities could be served by targeted

programming emerged at a regional level. Initiatives were partly triggered by the pending

(1980) reallocation of franchises, since regional companies were keen to be seen to address the

different needs of their local audiences. At the same time, other regions (generally those with

smaller Black audiences) only appeared to recognise the numerical (not cultural) significance of

dedicated Black access (i.e. those regions where there were less Black people, were less likely

to cater specifically for Black people).[11] Many ITV companies such as London Weekend

Television (LWT) began to experiment with schedules by using low-risk off-peak slots for

new types of programmes. In 1978-9, ATV produced three films (presented by Zia

Mohyeddin) entitled **Here Today, Here Tomorrow**, designed to outline the experiences of

Asians in Britain. This format was also used for **Here and Now**, a weekly multicultural

programme made by Central TV. In 1979, John Birt (then Head of Factual Programmes for LWT) produced **Babylon**, a six-part series presented by Lincoln Browne which was targeted specifically at young Black Londoners. Birt then went on to set up the London Minorities Unit (LMU) which produced several series for gay, Black and elderly (i.e. minority) audiences. Birt held the view that audiences for all programmes were made up of minorities but also stated that, 'The London Minority Unit's programmes are neither exclusively by or for their particular communities (although they are in part both these things) but they are emphatically about these communities' (Birt, 1980:6). This commitment to 'crossover' audiences was to be a feature of the first set of Black actuality programmes during the 1980s, but, as I will go on to argue, was also to develop as a source of tension in terms of address, content and reception.

The LMU went on to produce **Skin** (1980), a thirty minute documentary series broadcast on Sunday lunchtimes on LWT. Although it was aimed at both Asian and African-Caribbean communities, Jane Hewland, the executive producer, argued that the programme also had to appeal to the interests and concerns of White audiences (Hewland, 1982:18). Many have since argued that **Skin**, despite its ambitious forecast and acknowledgement of the need to shift exclusively from White, male and middle class perspectives, actually failed to satisfy or appeal to the majority of White or Black viewers. This has been attributed to two key reasons: first, the programme assumed that the British Asian and African-Caribbean population constituted a single mass Black audience and secondly, like so many mainstream documentaries before it, **Skin** tended to *explain* the Black minority to the White majority, thus being yet another programme *about*, but not *for*, Black communities. Also, following in the White mainstream documentary tradition, the series tended to be very problem-oriented. As Trevor Phillips recalls (he worked as a researcher on the series in his first television job), this bias weighed the

series down:

> we were always going on about discrimination, always talking about racism.
>
> There's nothing wrong with doing those things as such, but if you're
>
> making twenty-six half-hour programmes then you really ought to be able to
>
> say that the experience of being black or Asian in a capital city is a bit more
>
> than waking up every morning and thinking 'Who's going to discriminate
>
> against me today? What job am I not going to get?' - because life isn't like
>
> that for people. (Phillips in Pines, 1992:147-8)

Nevertheless, what the **Skin** initiative demonstrated was that, by the late-1970s, the

multicultural consensus had begun to establish itself, and that statements of good intent and

equal opportunities procedures were now being routinely applied in aspects of public policy.

Local government's emphasis on cultural diversity and central government's increasing

investment in police training in community relations, Urban Programmes and race education,

both displayed a commitment to encouraging 'good race relations'. The 1981 rebellions (see

Chapter 1) were followed by a number of further alterations in public policy, such as the Arts

Council's Ethnic Minorities Action Plan and of course, those initiatives made by the Greater

London Council which were geared towards the arts. The role of the GLC under the Labour

Left administration between 1981 and 1986, was hugely significant not only in terms of

moving the political debate from 'multiculturalism' to 'anti-racism', but also in boosting Black

cultural activities through training, development, education and funding initiatives (for more on

the GLC's investment in 'minority arts' and Black-British independent film practice, see

Chapter 9). As well as specific research programmes on media, policy and race, the Greater

London authority did much to advance the so-called 'ethnic minority arts' scene (see Vir,

interview with Malik, 30.5.96). Thus, in terms of broadcasting, many of those who were to

push 'race' onto the agendas of British television channels at this time, largely came from

outside the broadcasting institutions themselves.

The Black Media Workers' Association (BMWA) formed to bring together those from the African-Caribbean, Asian and African diaspora who worked within the mainstream (White) media or independent Black media. It began on a small informal basis in 1980 with Mike Phillips, Julian Henriques, Diane Abbott, Parminder Vir and Belkis Belgani but was officially launched in February 1981. BWMA, a pressure group, were concerned, according to Gary Morris, with two key aspects: one, 'concerns of the profession' which included monitoring press depictions of race, improving the independent Black media and liaising with media unions on these matters; the other was 'concerns of the black community', which included the establishment of a video group, attracting grants and accessing Black groups to the mainstream. In their first research report, the BMWA argued that racist practices in the media could only be tackled if more Black people were 'actually involved in reporting and editing, programme-making and developing images of black people for public consumption' (Brown, 1983:52). Morris says that the two standard responses towards the BMWA were firstly, that there was a lack of Black media professionals (which is why the BMWA focused on the issues of training and employment) and secondly, that evidence of racial discrimination was difficult to prove (Morris in Cohen & Gardner, 1982:76-9).

The Black Media Workers' Association eventually folded, partly because the key players in it moved on to develop their own careers (for example, Mike Phillips and Diane Abbott), but also because the ideals of the group itself gradually began to fragment as it drew in different types of Black media workers who wanted a number of apparently incongruous things. It has been argued by some that the key reason for the BMWA's collapse was that it contested

politics within established institutions. Imruh Bakari for example, suggests that in such cases, 'What you are doing is making the mainstream say "You must be the leader, you must be the voice, come, we will give you what you want and forget about it". Where is the agenda of the Black Media Workers Association today? That should have existed until now. It should have been an institution' (Bakari, interview with Malik, 10.12.96). Black activist efforts during this period were significant, but the reasons for their demise are also revealing about how Black politics have operated in such a way so as to ensure that few Black institutional frameworks have ever been able to fully establish or sustain themselves over long periods.

b) The Emergence of Channel 4 and the Multicultural Departments

But the impact of these various strategies geared towards gaining media access and equality were to have an important impact. In response to the growing debates about the influence, content and power of television, the BBC had set up the Independent Programmes Complaints Commission in October 1977, to consider viewers' complaints about particular radio and television broadcasts. In the same year, the Annan Committee which had been commissioned to research what form a new fourth channel might take, emphasised the importance of a liberal pluralistic model of broadcasting.[12] This it saw as a free market-place in which balance could be achieved through the competition of a multiplicity of diverse and independent voices. This revamp symbolised a shift in terminology and a substantial revision of the 'public service broadcasting' principle. The Committee went on to suggest that, 'Good broadcasting would reflect the competing demands of a society which was increasingly multi-racial and pluralist'. The Annan Report proposed that the new channel should prioritise diversity and innovation and planned that a new authority called the Open Broadcasting Authority (OBA) would take charge of the channel, but commission programmes both from existing ITV companies and

from independent practitioners (as a means to encourage diversity). (See Chapter 9 for more

details on the formation and structure of Channel 4 in relation to independent practice.) In the

light of these changes, the subsequent lobbying of government by CARM and the CRE

continued to emphasise the importance of reforming on-screen Black representation and

improving the channels of access for Black media practitioners. Despite hopes for the

proposed OBA under the 1980 Broadcasting Act, the new Channel emerged under the control

of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). Nevertheless, the Channel still proposed to

appeal to 'tastes and interests not generally catered for by ITV' and 'to encourage innovation

and experiment in the form and content of programmes' (Blanchard, 1982) which of course,

was welcomed by those Black people who had been campaigning for diversity.[13] Detailed

discussions for the internal structure and programme content of the fourth Channel

subsequently began.

Channel 4 began transmission in November 1982. Black programming was built into the

structure of Channel 4 and, as such, it was the first time ever that someone had been

specifically appointed to commission programmes for a non-White British audience (Farrukh

Dhondy replaced Sue Woodford as Commissioning Editor for Multicultural Programming in

1984 and maintained this position until 1997 when it was taken over by Yasmin Anwar).

Channel 4 also signified a new pattern of organised production. It was to operate as a

'publishing house', commissioning innovative work from different production units. Some

commented that Lord Whitelaw's (then Home Secretary) enthusiasm for the channel stemmed

from the hope that it would provide a 'safety-valve' for those who had, in the previous year,

protested on Britain's streets about state racism. To many, the advent of Channel 4 was seen

as a 'gift', given to all those who had, to date, been ignored or misrepresented by the media.

While there was a certain irony in Channel 4, with its commitment to a diverse conception of the national audience, emerging in the teeth of a recession and within the context of a Thatcherite government (Hall in **Black and White in Colour**, BBC2, Tx:30.6.92), it was a channel that had been vociferously fought for by those who realised the importance of an alternative third space to the BBC and ITV duopoly. The evolution of Channel 4 was to reveal three main things which are central in considering the history of Black representation on British television at large: the gap between policy and practice; the fact that structural changes do not necessarily improve programming; and the argument that institutional dependency has been the bane of innovative/alternative Black representation.

c) Multicultural Actuality Programmes - "What Say You?"

In general, early Channel 4 was more active in its Black actuality programming than in its popular fiction output. As Farrukh Dhondy reminded us, this was not simply a matter of generic preference, but a question of budgeting. He explained that, 'the bread and butter of minority television today has to be magazines and documentary. Drama is expensive' (Dhondy in Robinson, 1985-6:18; See Chapter 8 for how this affected drama). By the mid-1980s, Channel 4 had built up a large number of 'Black programmes', which formed a significant part of its weekly schedule. These included **Black On Black** (1982-85) (produced by Trevor Phillips) and **Eastern Eye** (1982-5); both were Black magazine programmes targeted towards African-Caribbeans and Asians respectively. The programmes began on controversial ground, since many had hoped that Sue Woodford (given Channel 4's proposed commitment to Black minorities and its commissioning not producing role) would have turned to a Black independent company, rather than London Weekend Television, to produce the channel's flagship Black programmes. **Black On Black** and **Eastern Eye** focused on news, current

affairs, cultural events and opinion, both nationally and internationally. Each programme, usually scheduled at 10.50 p.m., went out on alternate weeks, so that there were approximately 26 episodes of each in one-hour slots per year. The regularity with which the programmes were screened was unique in that, for the first time, there was an ongoing weekly presence of Black people on British television. (Since then, no terrestrial television channel has matched that consistency in terms of a specifically-targeted Black programme.)

Black On Black's team of reporters included Simi Bedford, Julian Henriques, Elaine Smith and Kim Gordon. It was originally presented by Beverly Anderson, with Trevor Phillips, Pauline Black, Victor Romero Evans and Louise Bennett going on to present later editions. Uniquely, the show had its own predominantly Black live studio audience. The programme-makers prided themselves on the mixed bag which made up the hour; a 'familiar mix of people and politics, culture and comedy, music and mayhem' (Phillips, LWT Memorandum 8.1.85). Like **Black On Black, Eastern Eye** covered a range of light and serious issues both home and abroad. Reporters included Dippy Chaudhary, Ziauddin Sardar and Karan Thapur. It was produced by Samir Shah (who, like Phillips had been a researcher on LWT's **Skin**) and executively produced, together with **Black On Black,** by Jane Hewland. The programme attempted to keep up with the rapidly changing Asian diaspora in Britain and appeal to first and second generation Asians. **Eastern Eye** was a little less structured than **Black On Black** in that it did not always follow its usual: 1)international issue; 2) British issue; 3) light/entertainment piece structure. Although **Eastern Eye** did blend the light (usually interviews with Bollywood stars) with the serious (anything from the Air India crash (Tx:25.06.85) to the increase in prenatal mortality (Tx:28.5.85)), there were more entire programmes devoted to single subjects, such as the new order of Zia's Pakistan (Tx:5.3.85), a

youth forum discussing the future of young British Asians (Tx:16.4.85), and a whole hour of

Indian classical music and dance (Tx:11.6.85).

While Channel 4 was proactively addressing Black-British audiences, the BBC - with no Black

programmes to speak of (apart from its traditional formats which emphasised links with

'home' - as outlined in Chapter 2), inevitably felt some pressure to do the same. In the mid-

1980s, BBC Pebble Mill attempted to match these two programmes with it's own versions -

Ebony and **Asian Magazine**. The latter, a revamped version of **Nai Zindagi Naya Jeevan**,

was subsequently converted into the English-presented **Network East** in 1987 (despite some

complaints from Asian organisations in Scotland). **Ebony**, like **Black On Black** was a studio-

based magazine programme. Although the series was scheduled in a relatively peak-time slot

(compared to **Black On Black**), and was also supposed to cater for Britain's African-

Caribbean communities, it did not receive the same critical attention as Channel 4's public

ethnicity shows - probably because there was a quite different climate of expectation around

Channel 4 and its minority programme provisions. Nevertheless, it was widely agreed that,

while **Ebony** did offer a degree of access, it was set up in a space (thirty minutes to cover a

broad spectrum of areas), that was bound to frustrate (Colin Prescod in **Black and White in**

Colour archive interview). Trevor Phillips however, argues that **Ebony's** raison d'être was to

conciliate White viewers, in order to avoid criticism. He compares this to **Black On Black's**

more direct approach which possibly made it more provocative or open to criticism:

> Ebony was the BBC's attempt to make Black viewers' subjects acceptable
> to White viewers. Black On Black was a programme made for a Black
> audience in a language we hoped that would be intelligible to White viewers.
> Our targets were completely different. We both wanted White viewers to
> watch, but in Ebony's case, that was their purpose. In our case with Black

> On Black, it was a by-product of what we hoped would be a successful
>
> programme amongst Black viewers. The last numbers we did on **Black On**
>
> **Black** suggested that 94-95% of the target audience watched reasonably
>
> regularly...(Phillips, interview with Malik, 30.10.95)

But the fact is that Phillips *did* have to consider what a White audience would make of **Black On Black**. Indeed, he stated in 1992 that, although the series was for a Black family audience, he wanted to show how Blacks 'could behave like everybody else' (Phillips in Pines, 1992:150). Phillips has gone on to defend the programme against criticisms that the programmes tried to cover too many disparate subjects and issues in one slot. He says:

> In an ideal world, I think I would have had a separate current affairs
>
> programme and a topical culture arts personality-type show, but these things
>
> all need to be viewed in context. In a situation where there isn't more than
>
> one opportunity, things are always going to be exposed, you're always going
>
> to have to pack everything because the audiences' expectations are that the
>
> things they're interested in will also show up in this flagship hour. So to
>
> answer the question, yes we probably tried to do too much, but only because
>
> we had to. (Phillips, interview with Malik, 30.10.95)

Others argued that these early Black programmes should have done for Black audiences what other programmes were failing to do: use the space to redress the imbalance. In relation to **Eastern Eye** and **Black On Black**, Sivanandan has argued:

> These programmes merely replicate the white media...The system wants that
>
> type of replication and 'balance', presenting both sides of a question, as the
>
> BBC says it does. What *we* want on 'Black on Black' and 'Eastern Eye' is
>
> an unbalanced view. We don't want a balanced view. The whole of society is
>
> unbalanced against us, and we take a programme and balance it again?
>
> (Sivanandan, 1983:7)

This was just one of the pressures which many early Black programmes-makers had to face:

that their 'marginal' space needed to be diametrically opposed to mainstream programmes.

Indeed, the awkwardness over how to speak accountably *from*, *about* and *to* Black

communities was a key feature of these texts. This tension was apparent in the BBC and

Channel 4's varied approaches to the Black-British diaspora and their inability to decide on

what exactly they defined as 'Blackness'. The anxiety over terminology was reflected not only

in the way units were (re)structured but also in terms of programme content and audience

address.[14] For example, the BBC's decision to lump together both Asians and African-

Caribbeans in a non-White category (in **Skin**) and Channel 4's decision to see the two as

separate communities (**Eastern Eye/Black On Black**) both attracted criticism. Where the

former was seen to deny important cultural differences, the latter was criticised for overlooking

the complexities of recent developments in racial politics in Britain, which had brought many

from the Asian, African and Caribbean diaspora together under the unifying category 'Black'.

Paul Gilroy argued that,

> the very separation and interchangeability of these programmes reveals
>
> something fundamental about Channel 4's understanding of race and racism
>
> in contemporary Britain. The existence of two programmes and the
>
> fastidiousness with which the boundaries of their respective ethnic concerns
>
> are maintained expresses the fragmentation of any common definition of
>
> 'black' which the communities involved have struggled to create (Gilroy,
>
> 1983:131).

In 1985, one of Farrukh Dhondy's first controversial decisions as the new Channel 4

Commissioner for Multicultural Programmes, was to axe **Black On Black** and **Eastern Eye**.

At the time, he urged the need for the Multicultural Department to commission a Black

company with a mission to develop current affairs output. The two programmes were

subsequently replaced by **The Bandung File** (1985-89) which was produced by Dhondy

himself together with two of his political co-workers, Tariq Ali[15] and Darcus Howe,[16] under

the newly-formed, Black-led, independent company Bandung Productions. As well as focusing

on the investigative journalistic side of its antecedents, **Bandung File** went back to the days

of Skin by once again collapsing together African-Caribbeans and Asians in one programme.

Dhondy argued:

> My determination is that Asians and West Indians are joined: it's about
>
> bloody time!...It won't be a multi-racial magazine, but a magazine of
>
> international affairs that all the British people ought to know about...I believe
>
> that the Bandung team can tell a story that no other British television
>
> company can tell, because they have an intimacy with the actual landscape, a
>
> historical insight into the evolution of black communities in
>
> Britain...(Dhondy in Robinson, 1985-6:17)

Reporting from a uniquely 'Southern' outlook, **Bandung File** spanned a range of subjects

from international affairs ('President Nyerere in conversation with Darcus Howe and Tariq

Ali', Tx:17.10.85), to the arts ('Profile of Vikram Seth', Tx:26.9.86, 'Linton Kwesi Johnson In

Concert', Tx:3.10.85) to home affairs which affected Black Britons ('Til Death Us Do Part -

Labour and the Black Vote', Tx:26.9.85). Indeed, **Bandung File** and **Black Bag** (which

replaced it in 1991), can be considered amongst Channel 4's more successfully analytical and

insightful Black programmes, with Dhondy's privileging of what he defined as 'real

investigative journalism' over 'grievance programming' (a preoccupation with the

manifestations of racism). **Black Bag** went on to include an examination of the relationship

between Asian newsagents and newsprint wholesalers, the intricacies of the Asylum Bill, and

politics in the Punjab. Dhondy said of the series:

> Black Bag tries to fulfil a very specific purpose - namely to instigate
>
> investigative journalism which is fearless, to breed real investigative
>
> journalists rather than looking for racism in every corner of British society.
>
> Again, we want to get away from grievance programming, though if there is a
>
> grievance and it can be done well substantiated in investigation, fine, let's go
>
> for it. (Dhondy in Pines, 1992:171)

Eventually though, the demise of these investigative journalism series left the responsibility for the coverage of key Black political issues to mainstream documentary slots such as Channel 4's **Dispatches.** One of the few series to foreground Black opinion in the 1990s, was **Devil's Advocate** (Channel 4/Prod: LWT, 1992-6), a set of studio debates which explicitly set up one opinion on a 'Black subject' against another. Although the series quite obviously courted publicity, mainly through the confrontational tactics of its frontman, Darcus Howe, the best of the series managed to critically air issues related to Black communities, such as an assessment of the changing face of the Notting Hill Carnival, the merits of new Black literature and an examination of the role of teenage magazines. It also granted space for key Black figures such as Bernie Grant, Nigel Benn and Imran Khan to face questions from a live audience. Perhaps one of the most revelatory editions was one which spotlighted writer/columnist Paul Johnson, who was being questioned about his views on repatriation. Towards the end of the programme, Johnson, quite obviously feeling harassed by a vocal studio audience, turned on presenter Darcus Howe, fists waving, declaring:

> This programme is extremely dangerous and destructive. The net effect of this
>
> programme is to set one race against another. We are in a multi-racial
>
> society. It means we must come together in harmony. This is what your
>
> programme is designed to do - it is designed to get ratings and popularity
>
> having rows. You are indeed the Devil's advocate. You are doing the work of

the Devil...You are making people angry, you're making people furious with

each other. That's exactly what the Devil wants you to do Sir. That's

exactly what the Devil had in mind...We should try and keep the tone of the

discussion with which we treat these [race] problems as low-key as we

can...What I fear is that programmes like this don't help. (Paul Johnson on

Devil's Advocate Tx:8.2.96; my addition)

Johnson's outburst (which brings to mind Sivanandan's aforementioned comments),

highlighted the 'fear' that 'outspoken' Black programmes, rather than being part of a liberal

broadcasting rationale, were divisory and in opposition to it.

Indeed, the very presence of specialist units and racially-targeted programming has elicited

disparate opinion about whether/how they can provide for Black audience needs. The main

worry that some have about the existence of multicultural units, is that they encourage the

'ghettoisation' of Black programmes, experiences and programme-makers by containing them

at the margins, thus always ensuring they remain peripheral to mainstream production and

representation. Much of the discontent with Black programming has also come from the fact

that some critics naturally resent any suggestion that there is a knowable Black community, a

guaranteed Black audience or even that such a thing as a 'Black programme' actually exists.

Furthermore, there is a general fear (although it has been systematically denied by those who

head the multicultural departments) that the actuality of minority units allows other

commissioners/departments 'off the hook', since they rely on the specialist units to cover

'race-related' topics and to have a conscience about Black audiences' needs. Alkarim Jivani

states that:

In June 1990, there were a series of meetings between PACT delegates,

various heads at Channel 4 including Michael Grade and Liz Forgan to

discuss the validity of the division. The PACT magazine reported that

"According to PACT's minutes of that meeting at least one commissioning

editor admitted that if there wasn't a multicultural unit, he would look harder

at proposals from black programme-makers". (Jivani, 1992:27)

What is certain, is that the advent of multicultural programming on Channel 4 did have a

profound effect on the way the other channels, especially BBC2 (the other 'alternative'

channel), developed. With every Channel 4 Black initiative, came pressure for the BBC to also

be seen to be committed to Black audiences. Although the BBC had taken equal opportunity

measures such as the Erlich Report, its first monitoring exercise to assess Black employment

within the Corporation, its response to Black audiences was, as we have seen, often vague. In

fact, it was not until May 1989 that the BBC (BBC Midlands), appointed its first Black

editors to develop targeted Black programming; Vastiana Belfon was appointed as Editor for

African-Caribbean Programming (she was the former series producer of **Ebony**), and Narendhra

Morar became Editor for Asian Programmes (he was previously the producer of **Network**

East, and joined the BBC after being head-hunted from LWT). The two units merged into one

in November 1992, and Narendhra Morar became the Managing Editor of BBC Multicultural

Programmes. The BBC Multicultural Department's (a declared Centre of Excellence) own brief

urged the need, 'to make programmes which contribute to the **richness and diversity** of the

BBC's output, serve those minorities not usually catered for by the other areas of output and

provide programming with a distinctive voice, thus enabling the corporation to more **fully**

reflect the whole of society and justify the licence fee' (Multicultural Programmes

Department Document, 1995:2). Despite these good intentions, the BBC has made an

embarrassingly large number of structural changes, thus exposing its piecemeal response to

Black audiences. The BBC has been perplexed by issues of terminology - who comes under the

'Black' category? What is a Black programme? What sorts of programmes do the Black

diaspora want to see? It has displayed a tendency to experiment with Black departments

(more so than Black programmes themselves) in a way unlike any other department, and has

been naive to assume that structural changes necessarily improve the programmes themselves

(Malik, 1995:13-14).

Meanwhile, Channel 4 has managed at the very least, to maintain a level of structural

consistency in the way its Multicultural Programmes Unit has operated. However, Dhondy's

relative autocracy as the longest-running commissioning editor in the scheme of Black

broadcasting (1984-1997) was, for some, shrewdly misdirected. Like his predecessor,

Dhondy's recruitment practices were heavily criticised for side-stepping both existing and new

Black talent. In addition, he made a number of controversial comments which appeared to

work against the interests of the Black communities he was employed to make programmes

for. In the mid-1980s for example, he argued that investigative journalism was a skill which

Black workers had to develop since it was outside of their normal experience - a view which a

lot of skilled Black media workers naturally resented (Dhondy, 1984). When I spoke to

Dhondy a short while before he relinquished his post to Yasmin Anwar, he described how he

saw his position and defined what he took 'multiculturalism' and 'public service broadcasting'

to mean:

> What makes multiculture is colonialism and the transfer of populations.
> When they lived where they were, they were quite happy, there was no
> multiculturalism, there was unique culture in separate parts. Multiculture is
> when you import lots of Muslims here...I feel that television *ought* to be
> editorially-led, ought *not* to be done by committee, ought *not* to have
> pretence at democratic opinion forming and giving people whatever they like.
> It ought to have a head sitting in charge of it saying 'I think this is what the

public want to have'. Between that and Channel 4, that's what I think;

between that and what I do for Channel 4 there is the commercial reality. I

know there are certain things I ought to do, even if I do not like them. I

ought to run Hindi film seasons...(Dhondy, interview with Malik, 1.9.96)

Given Dhondy's background before he joined Channel 4 (he was part of the **Race Today**

collective, a playwright, journalist and active member of the Black Theatre Co-Operative; See

Chapters 5 and 8 for more on Dhondy's creative television input), it had been hoped that he

would be able to liaise favourably with Black artists and communities. However, his rather

dictatorial style and the authoritative way in which he exercised his commissioning role

gradually drew criticism, as did his curious disengagement from aspects of the multicultural

reality his audiences lived on a daily basis.

When Channel 4 was established in 1982, it was hoped that it would operate as an alternative

to the orthodox policies and procedures fashioned by the rest of network television. To many,

Channel 4's committed mandate, which was essentially a reaction to a set of demands made

from different sectors of the British community (particularly White liberals and sectors of the

Black diaspora), was a dream policy. Indeed, the 1980s was undoubtedly the era dominated by

the type of pluralist conception which facilitated Black programming, and this was largely

because of Channel 4. In practice, although the Channel has made some real breakthroughs and

provided some real opportunities for a number of Black producers, the individual tastes,

policies and attitudes of commissioning editors, the concentration of production companies

commissioned by them, and the types of narratives and formats broadcast have often differed

from the ideal of expanded diversity. The C4 model highlights therefore how the tastes,

attitudes and values of broadcasters can alter in spite of and despite of policy. Recent critiques

have noted the gap between policy and practice and a decline in the commitment to innovation

and ethnic minority audiences. Since the 1990 Broadcasting Act which required Channel 4 to

raise its own revenue from advertising (previously the responsibility of ITV who partially

funded Channel 4), the Channel in its quest to boost revenue (thus attracting the largest

audiences possible) appears to have found it necessary to directly contradict its own policies

which pay emphasis to innovation and diversity (see Chapter 9). In 1992, Alan Fountain (then

Channel 4's Senior Commissioning Editor for Independent Film and Video) shrewdly argued

that, 'Channel 4 is an institution which has no policies, the policies are in a sense the tastes of

the commissioning editors' (quoted in Givanni, 1995:43). Ten years on from the launch of

Channel 4, the Controller of Arts & Entertainment, Andrea Wonfor, discussed her idea of what

'progression' constitutes: 'There's a limit to how many programmes people can take on the

Third World, environment or racial issues...They're all extremely important parts of the mix,

but the Channel is beginning to have a broader brief, which is healthy' (Wonfor, 2.11.92).

Of course, the dry, prescriptive and didactic feel of some of the programmes to come out of

the multicultural units may have prevented them from being seen as commercially attractive

products in the increasingly competitive broadcasting climate of the 1990s (see Chapters 9 and

10 for a detailed discussion on industry and political shifts which have affected Black media

workers). So where does this leave multicultural programming today? Although the units do

still exist, they are producing less and less dedicated Black programming. By the mid-1990s,

the amount of targeted Black programming had gradually begun to decrease. In 1997, the

European Media Forum found that between 1988 and 1995, Channels 4's 'ethnic minority'

programming was down from 163 to 64 hours of programming per year (a drop of 61%) and

that multicultural output had dropped from 3 to 1 percent of the channels' total output (see

Phillips, *The Guardian*, 13.10.97:6-7).[17]

At the same time, 'multiculturalism' was, generally speaking, becoming a more ubiquitous

feature across different areas of mainstream programming.[18] Many programmes which might

have once been considered as essentially 'minority-based' and which would have been

otherwise sidelined (through lack of promotion and funds, for example), are now being

produced outside of the multicultural departments themselves. In terms of the BBC,

programmes with multicultural or Black subject matter are now often made by other units such

as News/Current Affairs (e.g. **Black Britain**, see Chapter 4), BBC Education or the BBC

Community Programmes Unit.[19] Take, for example, the **BBC Windrush Season** (BBC2,

Tx:6-8.98) - one of the most significant dedicated seasons of Black programming ever to be

produced by British television - this was largely spearheaded by the BBC Community

Programmes Unit with Jeffrey Morris as Project Manager.[20] In terms of the role which .

today's multicultural departments can play, Yasmin Anwar argues that they need to register

the nuances of what she calls a 'new multiculturalism', which takes account of the fact that

racial difference is not only a Black/White thing but more about 'cross-culturalism' (see Malik,

1997). Perhaps this is something which we are beginning to see signs of. The most obvious

examples which spring to mind however (**Holding On, Birthrights, This Life, London**

Bridge), are not produced by the multicultural departments, and many of them are, in fact,

drama-based (see Chapter 8). It is healthy to see this 'cross-cultural reality' on our screens, but

the other reality is that there are few Black media workers working on those programmes

which are operating outside of the narrative structure of the traditional 'race relations'

discourse. Furthermore, small-scale, community-based, Black media organisations appear to be

increasingly unlikely to be involved in producing such alternative 'images of Blackness' in the

future. So whilst the Multicultural departments have provided important entry-points for many Black television producers, and while the number of Black people working in television production overall has clearly increased since the 1970s, this does not mean that the opportunities for creating radical or alternative representations of Black people have broadened. In fact, as I will go on to argue in the next section, the more active role played by Black people (both professional media workers and accessed subjects) in television production, can mean that they are becoming increasingly implicated in the production of stereotypes.

Section 3: The 1990s - From the Margins to the Mainstream?

Now that we have spent some time looking at the policies and programmes of the Multicultural departments, we need to turn our attention to some of the ways in which Black-centred texts, and specifically documentaries, have developed in the 1990s. Of course, given my point about the demise of multicultural programming and dedicated documentary strands, many recent Black documentaries have, in fact, emerged from the mainstream Documentary/Current Affairs departments. The 1990s have so far witnessed important shifts both in terms of the way 'access' television has developed and in how 'race relations' has been presented in television documentary programming. There are three points worth noting in respect to this. First, while I would agree that the 1980s saw important breakthroughs in terms of accessing the Black voice, particularly through the provisions of the Multicultural departments, the reconceptualisation of early notions of 'access television' (as an important political right to redress the media's imbalance), in the direction of the current trend of 'authored TV' and 'faction' (which builds stories/issues around its accessed characters), has been a critical alteration in the way 'access' has come to be defined. The character of access has

changed, so that while it has been popularised to occupy the ever-expanding mainstream, it also, I would argue, has a narrower conception of its politically radical potential. New accessed groups are now, in essence, a subaltern part of the mainstream so that we are now, in a sense, beyond the era of access. Access has become more implicitly incorporated and the nature of documentary itself has changed.

The second point, is that there has been a general move away from the political, public and campaigning emphasis of the earlier set of documentaries, to ones based more on personal identity, lifestyle and characters. We can of course, relate this to the rise of the entrepreneurial Black success culture, symbolised in key Black-British media figures with broad, popular appeal. For example, many recent 'non-fiction' programmes have been fronted by these Black-British 'crossover' stars (e.g. ragga star Apache Indian (**Apache Goes Indian**, Channel 4, Tx:19.8.95), Jazzie B (**Frontline**, Channel 4, Tx:29.6.94), Madhur Jaffrey (**Madhur Jaffrey's Flavours of India**, BBC2, 1995) and Ainsley Harriot (**Ainsley's Barbecue Bible**, BBC2, 1997). These programmes have not only signalled the increasing move towards hybrid formats (travel shows cum documentaries cum cookery programmes), but also the rise in enterprising Black-British personalities. In addition, 'non-professional' broadcasting now takes up a substantial part of the schedules and there are more opportunities for Black subjects to appear in these 'people-led', less problem-oriented, shows. The shift away from generalist, social problem documentaries is indicated in the rise of 'docu-soaps' and 'video diaries'. These are generally more personalised accounts ('human documents' based on personal rather than social issues/problems) and thus less focused on collective social groups and issues.

This leads us to my third point - that there is an increasing emphasis on the pleasurable and

dramatic elements of documentary. Despite a general shift away from problem-centred documentary and an end to the access era as we have known it, a number of recent documentary programmes, produced both by the Multicultural and 'mainstream' Documentary/Current Affairs departments, still insist on representing the Black-British subject as the bearer of social problems. In addition, documentary is now being narrativised and dramatised in unprecedented ways, so that we are now seeing some very sensational, conflict-led and voyeuristic depictions of Black social problems. As John Willis puts it, 'The line between fact and drama in documentary has grown increasingly blurred and in the struggle between journalistic truth and dramatic excitement, drama is winning' (Willis, *The Guardian*, 11.5.98:6). Many of today's documentarists appear to be actively *choosing* to creatively treat actuality in order to make their documentaries more exciting. Two further observations should be made here: first, that Black media professionals are now playing a more active role in producing some of these social problem texts; and second, that these new social problems tend to be exhibited *within* Black communities themselves. This has represented a move away from what Werbner has described as 'the one-way deterministic approach which defines immigrants as victims' of discrimination (Werbner in Werbner and Anwar, 1991:141), to a focus on points of anxiety which Black people are experiencing and - as I will go on to argue - often depicted as responsible for creating . So whilst significant shifts have occurred which now sometimes 'allow' the Black-British subject to be located outside the framework of the problematic, the dominant cultural association between Black-Britishness and social problems can still be found on television.

a) Black-produced documentary in the 1990s

The first half of the 1990s saw a continued investment by the multicultural departments, in

Black-focused current affairs series. Two of the most notable of these, **All Black** (1993) and

East (1990-), raised considerable criticism for showing an overriding interest in provocative,

sex-based topics like rent boys, prostitution and pornography. Morar (under whom both of

these series were commissioned), argued that documentary programmes are unavoidably

problem-oriented and that **All Black** was an indication of his department's refusal to shy

away from controversial issues. He added, 'If a series is current affairs, then I'm not surprised

it's going to be hard-hitting' (Morar, interview with Malik, 17.7.95). His assumption

therefore, was that a number of 'hard-hitting' 'Black truths' are 'out there' simply waiting to

be recorded in the name of liberal investigative journalism. I would argue however, that much of

the series did deserve criticism for their salacious *choice* of topic and the voyeuristic way in

which the 'analysis' was often conducted, which gave a particularly sordid picture of Black-

British life. Karen Ross describes how in one **All Black** 'report' on Black rent-boys (**Boys In

The Game**), 'the camera pans lazily to black limbs, oiled and sweaty, flexing in the gym as

another service provider explains the importance of having a good body: it's what the customer

expects and good money can be made only for as long as you remain 'young, cute and not too

hairy" (Ross, 1996:133). **East** meanwhile, while it did offer some interesting editions (such as

the one which looked at the three political parties relationship with British Asians,

Tx:29.5.95), tended, on the whole, to perpetuate the myth of a static Asian community or at

most, slight variations on tired themes. Enquiries were customarily concentrated in one

direction. The traditional iconography of the passive female condition in Asian cultures was

especially prevalent. One edition focused on polygamy, another on the abortion of female

foetuses/suicide rates.

Of course, there is no dispute that these are serious issues, and that many of them do indeed

relate directly to Black and Asian communities. I am therefore not suggesting that such issues

do not exist or that documentaries should be sanitized by excluding them; they should not only

show us the 'good side' of our lives or be too scared to provoke or even disturb. What I do

find problematic, is firstly that, coming from the Multicultural departments themselves, there

were inevitably expectations that while such issues might get covered, the terms of the debate

might start elsewhere and that the reports would be presented in more complicated and less

didactic ways. The overwhelming tone in many of these programmes, was, "this is a problem

that we are responsible for creating, we have to sort it out". Secondly, it is impossible to

disassociate the reasons why many Black viewers criticised these series, from why many of

them find the more mainstream, White-produced, social problem documentaries offensive - for

always locating 'the Black experience' in relation to the problematic and usually in relation to

the same types of problems and stereotypes. This is a tricky issue - how to present

investigative journalism *about* and *addressed to* Black audiences which does not reproduce

racist stereotypes or offend its target audience. Of course, there are important issues to

consider here, not least that some Black viewers are quite conservative and/or prejudiced about

certain issues (such as abortion, pornography, homosexuality), which might be another reason

why so many were offended by the series. As such, we need to acknowledge how these

programmes might have offended different Black viewers on a number of different levels and

for a whole range of reasons.

Take for example **Doing It With You...Is Taboo** (October 1993), a Channel 4 three-parter

which looked at inter-racial relationships from the perspectives of Black women and men.

Following a 'free' discussion format, the series invited its subjects to speak candidly about

their sexual relationships. But with presenter Donu Kogbara's tactical prying, the programme

constantly veered towards voyeurism and offered reiterations of mythologies around Black

sexuality - of Black men and women as better lovers, of 'jungle sex', of exotica (Ross,

1996:136).[21] As Celina Smith said of the series, by,

> focusing on sexual techniques and racial physical characteristics, to the
>
> exclusion of historical and political analysis, the programmes served to
>
> confirm rather than question persistent stereotypes and myths about black
>
> women being 'exotic' and 'sexy' and black men as well endowed studs.
>
> Furthermore, the choice of interviewees, the limited views expressed, and the
>
> shallow level of debate all helped to reinforce stereotypical images of black
>
> people as lacking in any intellectual depth. (Smith, 1994:58)

Evidence of more 'historical and political' analysis could arguably be found in a number of

actuality programmes which were being produced outside of the Multicultural Programmes

Unit, particularly by the CPU and BBC Education. The BBC TV Continuing Education and

Training Initiative's five-year Mosaic project was launched in 1989 to bring together

educationalists, BBC Education and other specialists from ethnic communities to devise a

number of projects. It went on to produce a number of anti-racist training programmes and

education initiatives such as the **Black and White Media Shows** (I and II, 1984/5), **Living**

Islam and **Racism and Comedy**. Also to come out of BBC Education was the **Black and**

White In Colour season (Tx:27.6.92-3.7.92) which featured the two-part documentary,

Black and White In Colour (Dir: Isaac Julien, Tx:27.6.92, 30.6.92). Through archival

footage, this traced the history of Black representation on British television from the 1930s to

the 1990s (see Malik in Newcomb, 1997:184). The season broadcast a number of British

programmes featuring Black people, and also explored the American experience of Black

programming (see Appendix B for **Black and White in Colour** programme details).

One particularly interesting production to emerge from the Mosaic initiative was **Birthrights** (BBC2, 1991-93; Ist series, Tx:8.5.91-12.6.91), part of the BBC Education Department's effort to invest in Black independent film production.[22] Its first series was pitched as:

> Six films exploring the questions of culture and identity and from a black
>
> perspective... Birthrights aims to raise awareness among a general audience of
>
> the multi-cultural nature of our society and to stimulate interest in the
>
> contributions made by various ethnic groups to all our lives. (**Birthrights**,
>
> BBC Memorandum)

The main success of the series was that it refused to privilege the 'shock factor' or a voyeuristic, anthropological approach when representing Black experiences. There was an emphasis on Black culture, history and identity in the series. The first series included a look at the centrality and resonance of black music (**Who Stole The Soul?**, Tx:15.5.91, Dir: Ngozi Onwurah - it won an RTS award in 1992) and an examination of British identity and Norman Tebbit's 'cricket test' (**Who's Batting For Britain?**, Tx:8.5.91, Dir: Salim Salam). The second series included a report on Black people's relationship with the city (**Black Faces, Green Pastures, White Politics**, SOI Film & Video), an exploration into Black people's attitude to wealth (**Black Gold**, Salamander Films) and Gurinder Chadha's moving film on elderly Asians in Southall (**Acting Our Age**, Umbi Films). This last documentary accessed its subjects, a group of Asian elderly people in Southall, to articulate their experiences through a series of video diaries. The third **Birthrights** series (Tx:5.7.93-16.8.93), included programmes on the experience of West Indian women volunteers in Britain during the Second World War (**Reunion**, Tx:5.7.93), a profile of the composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (**The African Suite**, Tx:26.7.93) and the highly-acclaimed **Crossing The Tracks** (Tx:2.8.93). **Crossing The Tracks**, presented by dub poet, Benjamin Zephaniah, was refreshing for its relevance to,

and regard for, current cultural developments. It was a rare example which examined the

influence of Black-British fashion, music and style on British youth culture at large. It traced

the increasing way in which youth culture is, "changing Britishness" in its cross-fertilisation of

ethnic styles, music and language. Zephaniah offered a lyrical presentation using key players in

this process such as Apache Indian, Cheshire Cat, Bally Sagoo and Joe Casely-Hayford.

Independently produced by Reel Life Television, it won a 1993 CRE Race In The Media

Award. In general, **Birthrights'** main success was its shift away from the social problem

rhetoric which had dogged the greater part of documentary images of Black hybridised

identities for years. Something which **Birthrights** managed to do more successfully than **All**

Black or **East** was to register the new cultural politics of difference (see Chapters 1 and 6) and

explore both the distinct and shared aspects of British Asian and British African-Caribbean

lives.

b) CASE STUDY 2: Modern Mainstream Access and the Case of 'Suitable Boy'

The 1990s has brought a glut of 'accessed' narratives - from popular light entertainment such

as **Beadle's About** (ITV) to viewer opinion in **Right to Reply** (Channel 4), from documentary

series such as **Modern Times** (BBC2) to viewer-led slots such as **Video Diaries** (BBC2) and

Video Nation (BBC2) (which won a CRE Race in the Media award in 1996). The

sophistication of camcorder technology and the increasing adeptness with which 'the general

public' is now handling it, has made possible new standard modes of televisual enunciation.

There is of course, a certain irony in the fact that camcorder dependent TV (assumed to be at

the height of 'access television'), is thriving when the public service broadcasting model which

gave rise to it (in order to confirm its public service status) occupies an increasingly vulnerable

position in the light of new commercial pressures (Dovey in Dowmunt, 1993). As 'pleasure'

has become an increasingly important component of programming, I would argue that

commissioning editors are keen to find fresh exciting approaches from their accessed subjects.

As Dovey argues, the edge is often found in 'difference'; 'TV today thrives on difference,

replicating it, feeding from it' (Dovey in Dowmunt, 1993:174). Together with the heightened

professionalisation of the discourse, has come a disregard for "Politics" (e.g. community action

groups, campaigns and organisations), indicating a shift from the early verifiably liberal

ideologies of access TV to an emphasis on what often makes the most story-led, tabloid-style

and of course, guaranteed viewing. Of course, budgeting and ratings pressures are not exempt

from (and arguably are the defining factor of) authored TV and the pressure to find a 'good

story' or at least to package it as one, still exists. As Dovey argues:

> 'Authored' TV, though often very moving, is no substitute for thoroughly
>
> researched, well-argued programmes about *issues*. The author-led programme
>
> can be dismissed because it is subjective; the diary form becomes merely
>
> another sub-genre of documentary rather than a far-reaching attempt to counter
>
> systematic representation. (Dovey in Dowmunt, 1993:173)

I want to cite the example of **Video Diaries** (BBC2/CPU, 1990-96), and one particular 'diary'

entitled **Suitable Boy** (Tx:19.6.96) to highlight some of these issues around access and

authorship in relation to documentary representations of the Black subject. Produced by the

BBC's CPU Unit, **Video Diaries** offered a set of authored narratives by diarists who

presented their story using a S-VHS camera which they had been trained to use. Here, the

accessee (appeared to) control the (entire) means of production. Peter Keighron has argued that

in this series we could see, 'video technology begin to interrogate the rules of documentary film

making...Now the fly is off the wall; the camera need no longer pretend to be a passive

observer, but can accept the role of participant' (Keighron, 'Private Eyes' *New Statesman and*

Society, 17.5.91). I would contest Keighron's analysis, not least because it overlooks the processes of selection (which diaries are chosen for the series) and editing (the ordering and selection of narrative).

Suitable Boy (BBC2, Tx:19.6.96) highlighted how selection and editing processes are integral to how the diegesis is managed. This, the first in the 1996 series of **Video Diaries**, followed the attempts of 19 year-old Omerjit Brar to find a husband and deal with an 'arranged marriage'. Although the narrative appeared to be quite firmly in the hands of Omerjit ('We were told at the end that 'This Video Diary was recorded and editorially controlled by Omerjit Brar'), I would argue that there was evidence of 'professional' image management in the programme, thus complicating the image of direct public access. The dominant focus of the film was that Omerjit's parents made life difficult for her after she rejected a marriage introduction which *she* herself had asked for. Omerjit wanted to marry her new boyfriend, Ranjit. Through the way Omerjit's deep unhappiness was constructed in the narrative, it was easy to assume that her parents were being irrational by objecting to Ranjit, and that they were forcing her to marry another man against her wishes. But in fact, it was only towards the end of the programme that Omerjit revealed to us, 'I told her about Ranjit. She was alright about it and asked why I didn't introduce him to her...' On telling her parents that she didn't want to go to Glasgow to meet her parent's chosen man (she had asked for a tall man who lived up North), the film suddenly cut from a scene where her parents were slightly frustrated, to her mother shouting at Omerjit to get out of the house and to the sound of a slamming front door (all of this was unseen and quite obviously dubbed in the final cut). The argument was clearly edited to produce a tale of woe and dramatic conflict. The camcorder acted as the subject's confidante with whom she shared an intense level of intimacy (at one point, we saw Omerjit

crouched in the woodshed, crying and calling her mother a "bitch" because she would not talk to her).

Here, the diary form was used to imply a chronological slice of life, an organic plot filmed in such a way as to hide its own process of structuration. The relationship between component parts of the text - or the 'axis of combination' - generated a particular meaning which fit into common-sense ideologies of Asian pathology. The unfolding of a familiar narrative pattern of Asian family life gave the mirage of coherent time and space. Another dramatic device (only apparent to the observant English/Punjabi speaker) was the misuse of subtitled translation. Speaking in Punjabi, Omerjit told her mother she was going to meet her new boyfriend. The mother told her not to make a habit out of it and said in Punjabi, "Otherwise I'll tell..." but was then cut off by her daughter. In contrast, the subtitle read, "Otherwise I'll tell Chunny [the brother] and he'll kill you and him." It needs to be asked who in fact, held the narrational authority, given such disparities and mediations. Nancy Banks-Smith's review of the programme the day after transmission indicated this shift in focus from the access *method* of programming to a preoccupation with its dramatic *content*. She described **Suitable Boy** as a 'steam-heated teenage soap' (*The Guardian*, 20.6.96:6). Banks-Smith's review also reminded us how access TV is not necessarily oppositional to the dominant representations or messages gleaned from 'non-access' television. The difference here is the author, which served to legitimise standard views on a given subject (arranged marriages) or community (British Asians). Banks-Smith wrote that Omerjit, 'behaves like a very young girl taking her first gulp of disobedience. I assume this is because she is a Sikh and unusually subject to family authority'.

c) The British-Asian and 'the inassimilable Other'

Continuing with the theme of British-Asian representation, I want to go on to examine the

dominant ways in which the 'British-Asian experience' has been represented in selected

mainstream documentaries in the 1990s. My argument here is that British-Asians in particular,

are still often represented in limited ways and routinely located within the framework of the

problematic in many of these texts. The logic of friction is habitually chosen over the logic of

fusion.[23] As I began to argue earlier, one aspect of recent documentary has been the

'personalisation' of the discourse, so that we now often find that Black people themselves are

actively involved in producing well-versed images of Blackness. Thus, rather than simply being

outside of or subject to the representational process of stereotyping, Black people (whether

producers or accessed subjects) are now increasingly implicated in it (see Chapter 10).

(i) Asian Women and Patriarchy

I would suggest that there are three dominant aspects of British-Asian representation in

television documentary. The first, relates to the ways in which women are represented as

oppressed by their own communities. We are routinely offered the soothing myth that

patriarchy, instead of being a universal condition, is only confined to certain ethnic

communities. One edition of the ITV current affairs series **This Week (Victims of Fear,**

Tx:1.3.90) began, '**This Week** has investigated violence against Asian women through the eyes

of the victims' and continued, 'In this Western climate of self-assertion, Asian men might

insist on conformity, but Asian women have other ideas. Many are now lifting the veil of

secrecy to speak out against the brutality they've suffered for so long'. The British-Asians

here, were interpreted via the 'between two cultures' Vs. Western liberalism pattern. Complex

identity formations were crudely located as negative, stifling and volatile. The first few shots

of **Victims Of Fear** showed a nightclub filled with young Asians. The commentary warned, 'This is the battleground of cultures for young Asians born here, torn between the traditions of their parents and the freedoms of the West'. **Victims Of Fear** went on to voyeuristically describe the use of hot knives and iron bars on its Asian 'victims' and imposed its own values on real-life incidents ('A London woman strangled for being too Westernised'). New documentary, old speak.

It is the slippery line between, on the one hand, accepting the liberal rationale which justifies the 'unearthing' of weighty issues within various ethnic communities and, on the other, Black people feeling constantly harassed, criticised or undermined by the media, which produces such mixed responses to the Black-centred social documentary amongst Black viewers (see Chapter 10). In reference to an edition of **Inside Story** called **Forbidden Love** (BBC1, Tx:3.2.98), which focused on the plight of three Muslim girls who refused forced marriages, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown wrote an article in *The Guardian* which asked, 'Is it really right that we should hide real problems behind a misguided sense of outrage?' The point she missed however, was that it is the liberal conscience underpinning this question - as invested in by generations of documentarists working within the humanist paradigm - which has traditionally encouraged the recurrent image of Blacks as a social problem. It is the codes and patterns which are used in so many of these documentaries which supports the ideological juxtaposition between 'the West' and 'the rest', 'us' and 'them', belonging and exclusion. In 'dealing with' these problems and always in the same way, television does, in fact, heighten its own sense of moral integrity and fair-mindedness which justifies the principles of public service and responsibility on which it is based. The point here is not that 'our situation', as Alibhai-Brown puts it, will not be helped 'if we never let the light in on the dark corners of our lives'

(Alibhai-Brown, ' Race out of TV's ghetto', *The Guardian*, 16.2.98:9), but that the light has very rarely left there. The fact that **Forbidden Love**, for example, was screened within days of another (Black-produced) 'oppressed Asian-woman flees home because of oppressive father' narrative, **Flight** (BBC2, Tx:25.1.98), did not help to dislodge the familiar stereotype of oppressed British-Asian women (see Chapter 9). But in any case, **Forbidden Love**, although it focused on the specificities of three Muslim Women's experience, tended to lapse into common-sensical generalisations about Islam and Asian femininity *per se* (the opening sentence was "Asian girls in Britain are straddling two cultures"). It went on to rest on classic images of conflict such as the police as mediators ("We take on the role of intermediary"), and the supposed opposition between East and West ("It was Paul or Pakistan - and I chose Paul"). Visual symbols denoting confinement (barbed wire, grey factory towns, back-to-back terraced houses, etc) and escape (for example, the ubiquitous train journey and the White partner) were liberally used.

There have been rare exceptions to this classic social problem discourse, such as Faris Kermani's **A Fearful Silence** (Channel 4, Tx:23.8.86) which, in the context of violence against Asian women, pointed to the inadequacies of the British legal system in dealing with interpreters, language differences etc., and traced the political activity of Asian women in campaigning for better rights and awareness about issues related to the British-Asian community. Hence, Asian women were not simply depicted as victims here, but as experts, campaigning as well as suffering.[24] As Pratibha Parmar has reminded us, 'to assume that these women have no history of struggle and are only politically 'born' when they arrive in the metropolis, is to deny their historical experience of fighting back, and to devalue anti-imperialist struggle as a whole' (Parmar in CCCS, 1982:249).

(ii) Between Two Cultures - Old and New Stereotypes

The second recurrent image of 'British-Asianness' which also underpins these tired images of

British-Asian women, is of the classic 'between two cultures' syndrome (which we can trace

back to **Asian Teenagers** in 1968 (Chapter 2)). One of the new dimensions of this image has

been that of the troubled British-Asian youth who takes *his* 'cultural confusion' out on

'British society' - an image which came to the fore in the coverage of the Bradford riots in June

1995 (see Chapter 4). Of course by the mid-1990s, many did begin to see a new side to

British-Asians - not the passive, nodding, law-abiding acceptance of the humble, inoffensive

Asian, but a more vocal side where discontent was articulated, sometimes very loudly. Tariq

Modood outlines some of the incidents at this time which foregrounded wider debates about

Britishness, identity and ethnicity:

> If communities as disciplined and restrained as the Bradford Kashmiris are
>
> hurling bricks and burning their neighbours' property; if Joy Gardner's death
>
> is "nobody's fault"; if Linford Christie feels his critics have it in for him
>
> because he is black, the prognosis for race relations must be gloomy.
>
> (Modood, *The Guardian*, 17.6.95:25)

The new stereotypes of British-Asians do in fact, function in relation to the old - they appear

to be different, but are often similar, holding remnants of the original and thus continuing the

myth. As Stuart Hall reminds us, 'Identity is neither continuous nor continuously interrupted

but constantly framed between the simultaneous vectors of similarity, continuity and

difference' (Hall, 1990:206). And this can also be said of representations of identity. Thus, the

'rajamuffin' image (the South Asian equivalent of the African-Caribbean 'ragamuffin') although

apparently *different* to the image of the 'fresh' Asian immigrant, is *similar* in the subject's

tenacious investment in cultural identity (strong links to religion, language and geographical location). Both represent struggle in some form. The new image, although seemingly quite *different* to its predecessor, is in fact, a *continuation*; a variation on a theme. It has remnants of the image of the ethnic group that can't quite manage to integrate or that have integrated so much as to alienate themselves from their own 'community' - either way, their identity is always posed in relation to 'degrees of integration', while always containing an inability to neatly 'fit', and always being located as 'Other'. As Charles Husband says, 'the 'imagined community' of the nation is built on assuming and asserting similarity: a process aided by the complementary identification of the non-assimilable Other ' (Husband, 1994:5). The two neat options are always 'assimilation' or 'repatriation'; the messy one is the mongrel identity, a painful 'in-betweenness'. The 'Other' is judged and located in relation to what is assumed to be 'neutral', 'natural', 'central' and 'the norm'. The Other is defined via the situational, and his/her identity is formed in a moment of crisis and instability when the politics of difference become starkly apparent.

We have sometimes seen the television documentary take on a mediatory or conciliatory role in order to 'solve' the social problem. This was explicitly played out in one recent documentary focusing on the British-Asian experience, **The Peacemaker** (Tx:30.3.98)) as part of Channel 4's **Witness** series. This traced the efforts of an international mediator (in Bosnia and the Middle East), Dr. Dudley Weeks, to appease the rival gang-violence between young Sikhs and Muslims in West London. Although the documentary did make clear that this tension was being perpetuated by a small section of the respective communities and that it had very little to do with the 'clash of religions', the whole framework of the programme was set up as a narrative of dramatic conflict between, as Weeks referred to them, 'the Sikh and Muslim guys'.

The overwhelming use of reconstructions and 'undercover' meetings between the 'rival

factions' in darkened rooms, gave the documentary a deliberate sense of drama. The

documentary was 'solutions journalism' of the most superficial kind (Weeks encouraged a local

authority-funded pilot scheme to train these youth in peace-making skills): an attempt to seek

out a conflict, send in an 'external' trouble-shooter (hence the title), and offer the sense that a

solution to the problem had been found (the fact that violent Muslim/Sikh attacks continue

today shows that no absolute 'solution' was in fact found; see *Eastern Eye*, 15.5.98:4). No

Asian person was shown to be particularly willing or able to resolve any conflict within their

own community and the programme ended with the sketchy and unconvincing 'happy ending'

that Weeks had educated the young Muslims and Sikhs about co-existing with one another.

(iii) British Muslims and the Rushdie Affair

The third important image which we can identify in recent representations of British-Asians in

television documentary, can be related to 'religious difference'. British Muslims and Islam in

particular, have become *the* ethnic Folk Devils of the 1990s and television has played a central

part in that construction (see Chapter 1).[25] The public discourses around the Salman Rushdie

affair in 1989 marked a shift from a preoccupation with *racial* difference to the new racism of

religious and *cultural* intolerance. As Julie Burchill recounts in reference to Professor Richard

Dawkins' comments soon after the Rushdie episode,

> ...if the white South Africans had been smart, they would have claimed that
>
> they were oppressing, torturing and killing the black South Africans not in
>
> the name of politics, but in the name of religion...if they had...a (sacred)
>
> cowed world would have whimpered a little, but basically allowed them to
>
> get on with it. For religion these days writes its own ticket. (Burchill, 'Art as
>
> an Alibi', *Punch*, 14-20.9.96:77)

For many in the West, the 'Rushdie Affair' pandered to racist beliefs about Asianness *per se*, while simultaneously confirming the theory of Western advancement based on a 'superior heritage of Western liberalism and of Christian charity' (Rai, 1992:75). Although the structures of subjective identity became easier to articulate for many British Muslims during this time, for others it caused confusion. Either way, it encouraged debate, reevaluations and an interrogation of matters relating to community, identity, nationalism and religious values. As Rai has noted, 'The Satanic Verses is no longer the name of a book, it has become the index of a seismic cultural shock, one that has opened up fissures and fault-lines, exposed weaknesses, revealed connections' (Rai, 1992:74).[26] In a similar sense to Bhabha's concept of 'translation' (see Chapter 1), Rushdie suggested that many British Muslims were 'struggling with...problems of hybridization and ghettoization, of reconciling the old and the new' and argued that Satanic Verses was in fact a celebration of 'hybridity, impurity, intermingling...It is a love-song to our mongrel-selves' (Rushdie, 1991:394).

Although there was no evidence to suggest that the majority of British-Muslims supported the fatwa (issued by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini on 14 February, 1989 and renewed in 1992), this was the implicit assumption made across the media, but most scathingly in the British press. The only British-Muslim who was given seismic media coverage, was Kalim Siddique, renowned for his staunch views and support for a Muslim Parliament in Britain. British-Muslim figures such as Farrukh Dhondy and Tariq Ali, in denouncing the fatwa, were represented (e.g. they were interviewed in more complex ways) as holding more reasoned, intellectual viewpoints.[27] In any case, the image of book-burning was, in fact, more complex than reports acknowledged (and according to Tariq Modood, a 'publicity-stunt' (Modood,

'Goodbye Alabama', *The Guardian*, 22.5.89)). The unanimity with which the British media in general offered 'cautious and timid condemnations of Islam', failed to acknowledge 'conditions of authorship' elsewhere or how Islamic writers had historically been censored by the West (Said, 1993:370-71). The boundaries between religion, culture, politics and history and 'Muslim Pride' and 'fanaticism', were collapsed into one. And with the selective documentation of this moment, came the fixity of the Islamic subject. A contradictory, complex and transitional phase for many Muslims became a crude and dogmatic expression of fanaticism for those looking in. The Rushdie affair became *the* defining moment in how we were to arrive at our judgment of *all* Muslims - except of course, Salman Rushdie (who was now in the safe hands of Western liberalism and fair-mindedness).[28]

Similar codes have been used in other images of Islam, such as in the coverage of two British nurses (Parry and McLauchlan) who were charged with murder and threatened with the death sentence in Saudi Arabia in September, 1997. The late-night discussion programme **Thursday Night Live** (Carlton/ITV, Tx:25.9.97), opened with an image of the Koran. It went on to show footage of the 'build-up' to beheading and photos of Muslims branding swords. It confused Islamic law with Pakistani law and entered into a general condemnation not simply of Islamic criminal codes, but also of Islamic culture. It was interesting of course, that the media debate about 'human rights' only became an issue when British subjects were involved. When the nurses were pardoned of the death sentence in May, 1998, the tabloid press (*Daily Mail*, *The Sun*) suddenly began to defend the cultural difference of the Saudi judicial system! A **Panorama Special** (BBC1, Tx:21.5.98) on the nurses release depicted the Saudis (according to the nurses anecdotal 'evidence') as, 'swarthy molestors of innocent British womanhood' (Bennett in *The Guardian*, 23.5.98:25). In both the Rushdie and the British nurses cases, the

overriding concern was not with the complexities of 'intra-ethnic or intra-diasporic conflict' (Parekh in Blackstone et al., 1998:18), but with the battle between barbarism and humanity, parochialism and modernity, and fundamentalism (as if it were only an Islamic thing) and free speech.

d) CASE STUDY 3: The Case of Underclass in Purdah

With these three features of British-Asian representation in mind (the oppressed Asian woman, the 'between two cultures' youth and Islam as a reactionary religious culture in need of 'modernisation'), I want to take the final example of a **Panorama** report entitled **Underclass in Purdah** (BBC1, Tx:29.3.93), to outline how these stereotypes have been developed in television documentary. **Underclass in Purdah** was nominated in the TV Current Affairs/Documentary category of the 1993 CRE Race In The Media Awards. The Press Release stated that, "Panorama' tomorrow night reports that the stereotype of a successful Asian community in Britain is a myth, with certain groups - namely Pakistanis and Bangladeshis - forming a new underclass, and performing much worse than Afro-Caribbeans. The programme reveals evidence that crime, drug abuse and family breakdown are all on the increase among these two communities' (**Panorama** News Release, 28.3.93).

Rather than taking an analytical approach, **Underclass in Purdah** worked with the simplistic and patronising logic that "the new underclass" needed to "get out of the ghetto" in order to better their lives. Close proximity with other Asians was portrayed as negative and self-destructive, encouraging the liberal solution of the need for 'integration' and 'assimilation'. The double marginalisation of the Asian community under investigation - their vulnerable class status and their particularly 'specific' ethnicity and religion (Islam) was reinforced by the

textual approaches used to 'explain' them. Furthermore, *social* problems were collapsed into

cultural and *religious* ones (thus 'Underclass' - a specific term used for a sub or low class

socio-economic group, was understood through 'Purdah' - which means a veil or curtain

secluding and screening Muslim or Hindu women). Throughout the programme, we were fed a

number of gross generalisations about *all* Muslims in the Manningham area and about British

Muslims in general. Thus the commentary stated, 'Those not looking for girls in Manningham

are usually looking for drugs' and 'Most Muslim-Asian families prefer to leave the British

way of life outside the front door' and then, 'Immigrants... have generally used two routes out

of the ghetto - business and education'. The primary definers of the text were the 'official'

spokes-people and the documentation functioned metonymically, insofar as the images of

British Muslims were developed as representative of the entire British Muslim community. ·

Throughout the programme, we were confronted with the notion of Western advancement.

Thus, "Even second generation Pakistanis and Bangladeshis born and brought up in Great

Britain are finding it hard to break out of the cycle of deprivation...The performance of

Pakistani and Bangladeshi children is creating a stink...They start the education race far behind

their White peers". We were told by a pimp from Manningham that, "Most of the girls are run

by Asians you know - they're all Asians - all the Asians are mixed up in drugs and you know

gambling and all sorts of things really". The 'expert' advice of a policeman claimed that the

proliferation of drug abuse in the Manningham area was due to the fact that, on arrival from

Pakistan, many Muslims have withdrawal symptoms since drugs are more common there.

Imran Khan was brought in by the **Panorama** team to comment - not as a professional

cricketer, but as a professional Pakistani. Khan empathised:

> I feel for these people you know. I've known the Pakistani community for
>
> years ever since I've been in Britain playing all around the country and
>
> recently fund raising for my cancer hospital. I've gone to the Pakistani

community to collect money and I have watched the deterioration. I've felt,

you know, that they are suffering.

Why was Khan expected to be a voice for British Pakistanis (note that the documentary was

made prior to his recent involvement with politics in Pakistan)? Would Ulrika Jonsson be

called in to comment in a documentary on Swedish politics? I think not. When it came to

analysing why the so-called 'cycle of deprivation' exists, the **Panorama** team began to set up

the argument that Muslims do face discrimination - but then brought in the expert opinion of

Tariq Modood from the Policy Studies Institute who concluded that, "the main reason for the

difference between Muslims and the rest of the Asian community is not racial discrimination".

As such, the programme offered mixed messages and dodged coherent analysis without

considering the complex economic, social and political underlying processes (around

unemployment, marginalisation, racism, welfare, etc.). As with earlier texts such as **Asian**

Teenagers (1968), issues tended to be lumped together. **Underclass in Purdah** rested on the

dominant signifiers of 'British-Asianness' - educational underachievement, arranged marriages,

alienation between generations, family conflict, with prostitution and drugs thrown in for good

measure - to explain their 'underclass' status. Although the documentary might have spoken

some truths about the 'underachievement' and vulnerable position of Bengali-Muslims in 90s

Britain, it was organised within a tired framework of hackneyed stereotypes which has

governed representations of British-Asians in social problem texts. A recurring emphasis on

arranged marriages for example, led us to understand this as a contributing factor in the

community's 'under-achievement'. Thus, 'Unlike other Indian communities they still prefer to

arrange their children's marriages with partners from the home village. For girls brought up here

it can be a nightmare'. We were subsequently offered a horrific case study of a Muslim woman

whose husband (a stranger) was, 'imported from her parents' village in Northern Pakistan. He beat her up whenever she refused to play the docile wife.' The accompanying image was that of a veiled Asian woman, looking blankly out of the window, holding a baby. The woman's discussion of the nightmare arranged marriage was attributed to her husband's 'lack of Western values' - this was subsequently linked to his lack of ethics, hence, his violent tendencies. The traditional codification of South Asian women and more generally, West Vs. East norms continued, 'He was more backwards, you know...'cos he's not brought up in this country. He's from Pakistan which meant we wouldn't get on anyway. He was completely different to me. I was more Westernised than him'.

Underclass in Purdah fragmented South Asian communities through the use of a 'divide and rule' strategy of representation and apportioned 'blame' onto the most disenfranchised members of them. While the documentary dismantled traditional notions of a collective 'Asian community',[29] it applied the traditional definitions of it to decipher the new situation. The implicit racism in the text, was that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are destroying themselves and carrying the burden of self-inflicted problems. The documentary narrative concluded, 'In many ways, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis find themselves in a worse position today than when they first arrived in Britain 30 years ago...Muslim Asians are now asking themselves how they got into this position when other ethnic groups are doing so much better'. We can note here the explicit emphasis on the *internal* problems within specific ethnic communities as a primary reason for their 'under-development'.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced a number of questions which relate to the area of Black television

representation in general. First, what has the history of Black programming taught us about the value of targeted slots?; secondly, to what extent and in what ways have representations of Black people in documentary changed in the context of increasingly life-style, pleasure-based actuality programmes and the changing nature of Black politics and culture; and thirdly, in what ways have ideals of broadcast liberalism (which gave rise both to multicultural programmes and continue to be used to justify the moral task of the social-problem centred documentary) framed Black representation? Although I hope to have commented on all of these through the course of the chapter, I want to briefly draw some conclusions here.

The tension between the limited access of the classic early documentary tradition and the democratic impulse to 'give voice' to those otherwise silenced, appeared to have resolved itself with the emergence of those programmes produced or voiced *by* the under-represented. The liberal concept of Black programming during the 1980s was a logical move, given the reality of mass under-representation and blocked access to the media up to this time. However unevenly Black audiences began to be served, the public service ethos which underpinned the principle of multicultural programming, prompted significant possibilities for, and versions of, access. It is almost certain that without specific multicultural departments and commissioning editors, many so-called 'Black programmes' would not have been produced or screened; that there would not have been so many dedicated Black documentary slots; and that Black programme-makers would have struggled even more to find a public voice on terrestrial television. Although significant gains were made in the name of 'access' during the 1970s and 'multicultural programming' during the 1980s, the various approaches, inevitably perhaps, sometimes misfired in terms of policy, politics, modes of address and content. There was, in general, a lack of filling for the package of a multicultural unit and this can be attributed to both

financial (i.e. more documentary and talk-based programmes than drama) and conceptual (i.e.

determining what a Black audience might like to watch) factors. What this in fact demonstrated

was that Black programmes alone provided no guarantee that all Black viewers automatically

or simply got the representation they wanted. Many multicultural programmes also proved

that new forms of racism and assumptions of what a 'Black audience' constitute can, in fact,

replace old ones. In short, what programme-makers/commissioning editors *imagined* Black

audiences wanted to watch and what Black audiences actually wanted from targeted

programmes were often two very different things.

Since I am writing in the past tense here, the general reduction in targeted slots since the mid-

1990s also needs to be noted and, I would argue, be considered as premature. Today,

documentations of the Black subject have tended to move out of specific Black programme

slots, to more mainstream (current affairs) programmes which occasionally touch on 'Black

issues'. Black audiences today have virtually nothing in terms of dedicated non-fiction Black

programming (apart from the BBC2 news series, **Black Britain**, 1996-). Binary oppositions

like Black Vs. White (documentary), Marginal Vs. Mainstream (documentary) are, as such,

becoming increasingly meaningless as the relations between them appear to be more symbiotic

(Gilroy, 1994). This was reflected in one of Channel 4's most recent Multicultural department

offerings, **The Ba Ba Zee** (1997) which was a late-night documentary strand containing a

number of provocative and challenging documentaries. Most notable were Mark Daniels'

enlightening analysis of the history of Blacks in US film and television (**Classified X**) and

David Okuefuna's excellent **Hitler's Forgotten Victims**, which focused on the Black victims

of Hitler's Nazi Germany. The question remains, however, of whether the increasingly

complex and changing realities of the Black-British diaspora have outgrown the premise of

Black programming? Are we now to assume that, since there are so few targeted programmes, Black audiences can find all that they want or need from the mainstream? The answer surely has to be that when Black audiences and media-workers feel as though they are being adequately served and accessed by mainstream British television, then that is the time when the multicultural departments have served their purpose (to diversify, innovate and ensure that other routes and points of access open up). Ideally, there should be no need for supplementary programming which is essentially what multicultural programming is. But until this point is reached - and we are not yet there - a need remains for an area of dedicated multicultural programming alongside the mainstream.

So what can we hope for the future of the Black public voice and indeed for the Black-centred documentary, as today's television adopts an increasingly 'modern mainstream' approach? Whilst the mediated access approach is more common today, and representational access is widespread, the level of genuine access achieved by the under-represented within these models is questionable. Moreover, the prevalence of representative access, by being institutionally dependent and assimilated into mainstream television, arguably diminishes any chance of a verifiably alternative space. Of course, the consolidation of Black stories into the mainstream is not in itself a bad thing. But it still remains to be demonstrated conclusively that now is the time to dispense with targeted Black documentary programming; and that mainstream documentaries have proved themselves as more adept with excavating unrecorded Black stories from varied viewpoints. It would seem, particularly from the examples I have looked at in the final section, that these have not yet been shown to be conclusively the case. Whilst the politics around Black programming in its current state needs a major rethink, there is, it would seem, still a place for it on British television. Black diasporic identities are formed through a

variety of dynamics and this still needs to be reflected on-screen in more consistent ways.

Today, the quest is not so much for simply understanding niche markets but for soliciting them. The type of liberal freedom sought today is not essentially about ensuring access to resources or society provisions, but about 'market liberalism'; the *economic* freedom to do as well as one can, leaving the broader contextual questions to market forces. This politics is essentially constructed in line with neo-liberalism's capitalist values which prioritises the needs and desires of the individual and the free market over all else; thus closing up the space for a more pluralistic conception of society - unless it meets the needs of a profitable cultural marketplace. The increasing shift towards infotainment and docu-soaps (for which ITV was rebuked in the ITC's 1998 Annual Report) signals this general closing up of spaces for genuinely critical and insightful documentaries. Such developments have an obvious impact on dedicated Black programming and Black-centred documentaries. The fact that the average black current affairs programme brings in approximately half a million viewers leaves it commercially unattractive in an increasingly competitive market-place (see Chapters 9 and 10 for a detailed discussion of commercial shifts in television). There is a new emphasis on secondary markets and 'value pricing' (i.e. how much a programme is 'worth' in terms of the number of viewers it will attract). Colin Stanbridge (Managing Director of Carlton Broadcast) claims that a mainstream programme is considered as one that gets 9-10 million viewers and that, 'If a programme gets two million then it's not going to survive, if a programme gets half a million, it wouldn't be there in the first place in network terms. It's about what audiences that show will get' (quoted in Smith, 1996:28). We can conclude then, that while we might see more Black people in mainstream actuality programming and while there might be more Black people involved in the production of these texts, the *types* of images we will see are likely to be those

considered to draw in the most viewers.

NOTES

[1] Within the context of this discussion, I take access programming to mean programmes which consciously profile the under-represented, and which have a public service ethos in mind.

[2] I will only refer to non-fiction (magazine and current affairs) Black programmes in this chapter. For an analysis of other Black programmes, see the relevant chapters.

[3] See Chapters 8 and 9 for more on oppositional race relations narratives and on uses of the realist aesthetic in Black-produced work.

[4] Note that the 1994 report commissioned by the ITC found that 73% of those interviewed believed that documentaries on all four main television channels were fair and unbiased, highlighting that there are a large proportion of the TV audience that continue to believe in the reliability and neutrality of actuality programming (1994 ITC Report).

[5] See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of television's treatment of the National Front, British National Party and Anti-Nazi League.

[6] Home Office 'Broadcasting White Paper', Cmnd 7294 (London, HMSO, 1978) and the Commission for Racial Equality 'Broadcasting in a multi-racial society' (1979).

[7] Sweden for example, had three times more ethnic minority programming than Britain in 1977. For these and other figures, see Anwar, 1978.

[8] Examples include 'Geet Mala' (BRMB), 'Jhankar' (Beacon), 'Meeting Place' (Pennine) targeted at Asian radio listeners and 'Rice & Peas (LBC) aimed at African-Caribbeans.

[9] Anwar and Shang found that 93% of African-Caribbeans listened to the radio compared to 70% of Asians. By comparison, very few people in his survey never watched television, and most watched television everyday (28% of African-Caribbeans surveyed and 15% of Asians watched television for more than 30 hours a week.

[10] E.g. Article 1.4 of ITC guidelines on 'good taste and decency'. Also BBC Producers' Guidelines (1993). See Chapter 10 for a detailed discussion of (the limitations of) TV policy on race.

[11] At the 1996 CRE 'Channels of Diversity' conference, many such regions (HTV and BBC Scotland) admitted that they had not adequately addressed issues around ethnic minority employment and programming.

[12] The report ended, 'We do not consider, however, that the relations between the broadcasters and the public are satisfactory' (Report on the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, Annan Report, HMSO, 1977).

[13] Of course, like the other channels, Channel 4 was ultimately answerable to 'higher' powers (i.e. the IBA, which was, in turn, accountable to Parliament) than the viewing community itself.

[14] This was particularly evident at the BBC. In 1982, it established the 'Ebony Unit' for African Caribbean programming. In early 1985, the Ebony Unit moved from Bristol to Birmingham to become part of Pebble Mill's General Programmes Unit. In 1989, the Ebony Unit became the African Caribbean Programmes Unit which, together with the Asian Programmes Unit, took charge of the BBC's multicultural output. In May 1991, the BBC appointed Vastiana Belfon and Narendhra Morar as editors of African-Caribbean and Asian Programming respectively. In September 1991, the BBC decided to dissolve its two separate Units (now headed by Narendhra Morar and Colin Prescod and for a while, Terry Jervis) into one Multicultural Unit based at Birmingham Pebble Mill. The Multicultural Programmes Unit (with Narendhra Morar as Managing Editor) disbanded in late 1995. Asian programming has since remained at Birmingham and in March 1996, the African Caribbean Unit based at BBC North in Manchester was formed with Dele Oniya as its Executive Producer.

[15] Ali was an active anti-Capitalist campaigner in the late-1960s and spoke in the anti-Vietnam war demonstration in Berlin in 1968. In 1997, he became one of the presenters on BBC2's late-night political discussion programme, **The Midnight Hour** (which Trevor Phillips also used to present).

[16] Darcus Howe is one of the most notorious (for his 'outspokenness') presenters on British television. He was formerly the editor of *Race Today,* organised the New Cross March in 1981 (see Chapter 1) and

was involved in trials in the late-1960s following a police raid. Howe was also the co-founder of the IRR with Sivanandan.

[17] Nevertheless, Channel 4 in the 1990s is (according to research conducted by the BBC and CRE), still perceived as the channel which most caters for minorities (see Appendix I).

[18] It should also be noted how the concept of multiculturalism has been publicly derided by many (see Chapter 1). In October 1997, Norman Tebbit argued that multiculturalism was a divisive force in British society and that members of ethnic minorities risk being "foreigners holding British passports". Appearing on **Breakfast With Frost** (BBC1, Tx:5.10.97), Tebbit stated, "If you get different societies mixed up and living close, cheek by jowl, you will splinter our society...you cannot have a whole load of different cultures in one society. You have one culture for one society".

[19] **Mosaic, Birthrights, Funky Black Shorts** and **Black & White in Colour** all came out of BBC Education and **Video Diaries, Video Nation** and **Open Space** have been produced by the Community Programmes Unit.

[20] On 30 May 1998, BBC2 launched a season of programmes to commemorate 50 years of Caribbean influence on Britain. It began with the four-part documentary **Windrush**. This was narrated by Patrick Robinson, produced and directed by David Upshal and Trevor Phillips was series producer. Other programmes in the **BBC Windrush Season** included **Black Firsts** (6-7.98), **Love in Black and White** (Tx:30.8.98), **Caribbean Shorts** (6.98), **A Small Piece of Home** (6-7.98) and **Windrush Gala Night** (Tx:25.7.98), a celebration of Black-British arts and entertainment. The season was part of a range of national events to commemorate the occasion.

[21] In fact, the terms of the debate were strikingly similar to the type of discussion we can routinely find in mainstream talk shows. For example, one edition of **Kilroy** (BBC1, Tx:26.1.97) discussed why White women like Black men. The discussion focused on Black men as better lovers with bigger penises and better rhythm etc. Kilroy asked, "Do Black men make better fathers?...Are they better in bed?" Kilroy's final question was, "Are we ever going to not have to have this conversation?" to which one Black studio guest answered, "We shouldn't be having it now".

[22] **Birthrights'** style of commissioning different production companies on a one-film basis was later echoed in the making of **Hidden Empire** (BBC2, 1996).

[23] This has only really begun to be publicly challenged since the mid-1990s and mainly outside of broadcasting. For example, in magazine journalism (**Second Generation**, launched in 1996), live stand-up and sketch comedy (e.g.The Secret Asians), theatre and music (Asian Dub Foundation, Nitin Sawhney, Cornershop). Both Gilroy (1993) and Bhabha (1994)offer alternatives to the 'between two cultures/'culture clash' thesis.

[24] Note how the media in general has seldom acknowledged Asian women's participation and political involvement in campaigns and industrial strikes (see Chapter 1 and Sivanandan, 1982).

[25] Under the terms of the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the BBC Agreement, religious broadcasts must not include racist comment or abusive treatment of other people's religious opinions or beliefs.

[26] Less widely reported in this year was the active participation of British Muslims in the national political process, most notably in the 1989 local elections. In 1996, there was much dispute in Birmingham and Glasgow (where there is a relatively high Muslim population) regarding Muslim's rights to select a Muslim Candidate for the Labour Party. The row was sparked off by boundary changes in Birmingham and Former Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley's pending retirement from his seat in the old Sparkbrook constituency. This raised a number of issues about cultural difference and corruption in the political process regarding membership abuse and language barriers. Discussed in detail on **Newsnight** (Tx:18.1.96).

[27] Notable liberal thinkers who supported Rushdie were Fay Weldon and Roy Jenkins. Jenkins (under whom the 1976 Race Relations Act was passed), stated, 'we might have been more cautious about allowing the creation in the 1950s of a substantial Muslim community here' (Jenkins in *The Independent*, 4.3.89).

[28] Rushdie was however, also criticised by some in the press for his 'poor judgment' (see Parekh in Blackstone et al., 1998:18).

[29] My concept of community rests somewhere between Gilroy's and Saifullah Khan's - as a sometimes useful term when considered according to context, but not one which hermetically contains people or as the definitive framework within which a group of individuals can (be seen to) exist. See Werbner in Werbner and Anwar, 1991:120-3 (Fig 4.1- 4.4 'The multiple identities of British Pakistanis').

Chapter Four

The Packaging of Black and Asian Identities in British Television News Narratives

If, as Stuart Hall says, 'the classic realist text sets the viewers in a position of transparent and unproblematic knowledge in relation to their representations of 'the real', which they actually produce but which they appear only (naturally) to reflect', then television news can be considered as the archetypal 'classic realist text' (Hall, 1980:159). Like documentary, the news tradition has rested heavily on notions of verisimilitude and its values of truth and impartiality are principally assumed, and passed off as, generically innate. And like the documentary genre, Black people have, since the 1950s, figured high on the news agenda - usually as troubled subjects. News can be placed at the zenith of debates about television and citizenship. If television can be seen as capable of facilitating 'the resources for citizenship required by a mature democracy' (Murdock in Tomlinson, 1990:100), then we need to ask what we are being told about the imagined community of 'nation' through news?

This chapter aims to outline the key ways in which 'race relations' and the Black diaspora have been presented in television news output. The discussion entails a quite detailed examination of the determination of news, as well as a focus on the reporting of specific 'Black news stories' to explore how Black subjects have historically been 'raced' in this area of programming. Although I will frame my argument around selected news texts, I will also ask what role news presentation has played more generally in terms of shaping, producing or reconfirming the 'common-sense' attitudes towards race which I have so far identified in the discussion of documentary. I hope to touch on some of the areas which Denis MacShane has

outlined in his breakdown of what the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) categorise as 'race reporting': first, 'the insertion of race into normal news coverage' (or the use of 'adjectival racism' - mention of a subject's ethnic origin when it is not strictly relevant); secondly, stories about immigration; thirdly, coverage of the National Front; fourthly, the interactions between anti-racist factions and the police (or 'riots'); and finally, mainstream political interventions in race issues (MacShane, 1979:91-95; See Appendix E).

In the first section, as well as taking a brief overview of the history of news presentation on British television, I will attempt to define some of the genre's properties. In the second section, I want to examine some of the attempts made at achieving 'balance' in race reporting and focus mainly on how television news (and here I include party political broadcasts) both in the 1970s and 1990s has represented extreme Right views on 'race'. In Section 3, I will select examples of news narratives which have featured Black subjects and examine the key ways in which 'Blackness', both here and in the foreign context, have been presented in news discourses. In the first case study, I examine one of the most recurrent images of 'Black-Britishness' in news programmes: the 'race riot', and more specifically the 'trouble-making', disaffected Black youth. I will focus in particular, on the news coverage of the 1981 and 1995 'rebellions' in Brixton. The second case-study shifts the focus from the British to the 'foreign' context in order to analyse the ways in which foreign aid and dependency have been presented in news discourses.

Section 1: The News Genre

a) A Brief History of British Television News Presentation

The history of television news began in the 1950s, around the same time that the Black

presence was beginning to be significantly felt in British society. As I began to argue in

Chapter 2, the formative years of television saw a cautious approach to the presentation of

'factual' subject-matter. Although today we consider news to be an integral and continuous

aspect of television, the first news broadcast (**BBC Television News**) did not come until 5

July, 1954. Prior to this, there was a fear that the visibility of (the changing facial expression

of) a newsreader, reporter or interviewer would undermine news impartiality. As a

consequence, 'visible' newsreaders were forbidden on television until September 1955. Thus,

early television news reports were little more than radio news and were often simply a rerun of

radio bulletins. The caution with which news was presented on television implies two things:

first, an acknowledgement of the power of television in the fear that its audience could be

easily-led or mis-led; and secondly, the implicit assumption that impartial objective coverage

of social and political issues was achievable. The fact that the early television medium was

'live' also made it impossible to spontaneously cover the news of the day or capture incidents

that had already occurred.[1] As such, early news was structured around 'News Reviews' as in

Newsreel (BBC, Tx:5.1.48-54) which covered national and international events on a weekly

basis.

The investment in news as a TV genre of its own, only really began to emerge in the late-1950s

and early 1960s. Independent Television News began on ITV on 22 September, 1955 and was

to shape the future of television news presentation in Britain. ITV adopted a more brawny

style, more in line with US news presentation. It structured itself as a free-standing programme

with potential audience pulling-power rather than a filler between programmes. The

introduction of a half-hour daily news slot by ATV in 1967 (**News at Ten**) managed to attract

audiences of approximately twelve million, indicating the marketability of the news as a

distinct genre on television, and the potential for alternative modes of address to the BBC's

largely cautious and deferential approach. There were special correspondents for specific areas

(e.g. four key foreign correspondents) and the newsreaders were usually journalists who wrote

their own news-scripts. Since the 1960s, the BBC and its commercial rivals have battled to see

who can provide the most comprehensive, robust and insightful news programming. The

contemporary news style is, in crude terms, divided between BBC1 and ITV's image-led

bulletins and BBC2 and Channel 4's more analytical and dialogue-led approach (e.g.

Newsnight and **Channel 4 News**). Channel 5, meanwhile, has taken deliberate steps to

develop alternative news formats and agendas to create a more accessible and 'modern

mainstream' news approach.

b) What is News?

News, both through the way it presents itself and because of the level of information it offers,

can be considered as part of many television viewers' domestic ritual.[2] Alongside the high

consumption of the genre, news is commonly perceived as one of the most fair, truthful and

unbiased genres on television.[3] In order to work, television news rests on narcissistic ideals

central to the traditions of British broadcasting - that it is a fair, balanced and complete

recording of reality. (I will go on to examine some of the critiques of 'balance' in the next

section.) News works *through* impartiality. Unlike other aspects of the news media such as

the press, television hides the actuality of editorial control behind an often convincing facade of

'balance' - 'it pretends to impartiality while choosing carefully where the fulcrum should be

placed' (Seaton and Pimlott, 1987:133). It selects and then produces its own set of narratives

for the day; events and developments are subsequently converted into stories to be packaged

in a way that we have come to recognised as 'news'.[4] Locating itself as integral to our

'systems of thought', news is the usually unpleasant-tasting dose of daily medicine that 'the general public' are encouraged to take 'for their own good'. The lack of honesty about the political locations of televisual news output and the infallible self-image which large chunks of the medium project, is an extension of the framework of impartiality established in the early years of television's development, and more specifically as the offspring of notions of 'public service'.

News traits, such as its predictability, repetition and facticity, locate it as a distinct television genre. As MacDougall notes:

> At any given moment billions of simultaneous events occur throughout the world...All of these occurrences are potentially news. They don't become so until some purveyor of news gives an account of them. The news, in other words, is the account of the event, not something intrinsic in the event itself.
> (MacDougall in Hall et al, 1978:53)

News, in general, tends to select the same stock of stories from a vast number of possibilities; certain agendas and issues are privileged over others in terms of importance. The lack of variables offered in terms of the way a story is carried and the similarity in the ordering and presentation of the same news stories across and within channels and mediums, disguises the building process behind the production of news. The 'herd-like' impulse (i.e. the tendency for different news channels to carry the same story, and in similar ways) serves instead, to suggest that there is a universal consensus about *what* news is and *how* it should be presented (mode of address, information supplied and withheld, angles provided, opinions given, etc.). Thus, we see the product of an organising procedure, a simplification of the world through sound bites and snapshots. Barrat notes how, 'News values serve to organise and give structure to the

chaos of real world events, providing the newsworker with essential guidelines to the selection, construction and presentation of the world in the news' (Barrat, 1986:95). The impression given, is that if the cameras weren't there, then it did not happen; that if the story isn't covered, it is not newsworthy enough. Essentially, news is dependent on the past and on anticipating the future. As the German philosopher and critic, Ernst Bloch, once said, 'Time *is* only because something happens, and where something happens, there time is' (Bloch, 1970:124).

Denis McQuail has identified four stages of news production: news interest, events, news selection/values/criteria and the news report (McQuail, 1987:209). The main point of contention is whether the television newsgathering process is constructed as a response to 'real life' events and subsequently produces public interest/informs the public or whether news is constructed in response to a selective agenda and criteria of what will be of interest to the public. I would suggest that, while some news programmes are necessarily a combination of both patterns of production, where some stories might be selected because they are inherently worthy of coverage (major disasters, political developments, killings etc.), others are covered simply because news editors realise that the story will actively *produce* interest. In addition, there is a complex relationship between institutional news agencies (the 'primary definers' of news) and editors/journalists (the 'secondary definers').[5] 'Good news' or what Stuart Hall et al have called 'the *professional ideology*' is further determined by '*over-accessing* to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions' (Hall et al, 1978:58).

The basic units of TV news texts (the visual and aural signs) combine to produce meaning, and narratives are constructed to leave the viewer with a particular version of a topic such as 'race'.

Narrative meaning is produced both through individual signs and through the way they are

combined together (syntagm) into wider patterns of meaning. Narrative is an ordering of

material into a sequence which often suggests truth and accountability. The narrative is

constructed through the editing, selecting and connecting of material in a way that seems

inevitable. The 'reliability' of news narratives leaves little space for the reader to disagree. The

narrative typology consists of a collection of codes. For example, in the coverage of the Gulf

War in 1991 (which, it is worth noting, squeezed news of African famine from the news

agenda), the ambiguous allegiances we might naturally have felt were directed by the US media.

As Martin Lee and Norman Solomon argue, 'American journalism surrendered to the U.S.

government long before Iraqi forces did on the battlefield' (Lee and Solomon in Lucas and

Wallner in Dowmunt, 1993:176).[6] The complex political causations of the war and various

interests held by those involved in it, were packaged into two dominant news narratives: one,

that the US troops and the allies only concern on entering the Gulf, was to safeguard Saudi

Arabia; and two, the image of Saddam Hussein as the archetypal Eastern 'baddie'. Hussein was

depicted as a dictator who appeared to have no boundaries and no ethics; a control freak who

would do anything but listen to Western 'reason'. Issues around the United Nations, oil,

East/West relations both past, present and future, the shifting war objectives, and the use and

extent of war technology, were rarely addressed in detail and, as a consequence, we were given

a carefully angled and easily decodable recording of events. The point here is that in its quest

to describe a sequence of events, (news) narratives use a particular type of pattern which we

can recognise as formulaic (beginning, ending, cause & effect, purpose, meaning) and, as such,

order events within their own and our narrative logic.

Section 2: 'Balancing' Race Reporting

As I argued in Chapter 2, prior to the 1960s, 'race', although considered as a social issue, was

yet to be intensifyingly located at the centre of notions of crisis and conflict. To this degree, it

was not really a major news talking-point. The predominant early newsreel footage was of

Black Commonwealth citizens coming to Britain in the post-war years - Lord Kitchener

(Aldwyn Roberts) singing "London is the Place for me" as he stepped off the *Empire*

Windrush, various 'waves' of immigration from the Commonwealth, images of 'the

newcomers'. As Angela Barry argues, 'When British viewers saw the smiling 'Jamaicans' on

their screens, the potential menace of their 'otherness' was overridden by the comforting aura

of Commonwealth with its roots in the glorious imperial past (Barry in Twitchin, 1988:86).

Later in the 1950s, when there were signs of 'racial tension' in Britain, news coverage largely

focused on the problem of 'mob violence' and 'riot terror'. This was not especially related to

Black people, but more to a 'racial problem' in particular geographical areas such as Notting

Hill. Thus, following the 'Shameful Episode in Notting Hill' (British Pathe, 1958), a BBC news

bulletin warned, "Something new and ugly raises its head in Britain - racial violence...the

injured victim, a Jamaican, is taken to safety". It was only really in the late-1960s, around the

time of Powell's mass media exposure, that Black people became a regular fixture in news

representation. Immigration became a hot media and legislative issue in the late-1960s/early-

1970s, with bulk expulsions from Kenya (1968), Uganda (1972) and Malawi (1970s) giving

rise to a number of spin-off news stories about how Britain would be affected by the 'influx'

of immigrants. In the early to mid-1970s, the press were especially obsessed with stories

about illegal immigrants and Heathrow detentions; virginity testing (an appalling violation of

Asian women endorsed by immigration officialdom in order to check the 'virgin status' of

newly-arrived Asian immigrants) (see Wilson, 1978); and with the case of a Malawi-expelled

British-Asian family being put up in a £600 a week four star hotel.

a) Identifying News Bias

During the 1970s and within the context of general debates around access and balance, there

were widespread criticisms that news in general and race reporting in particular was far from

impartial (see Chapters 1 and 3). In 1976, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and

CARM criticised the absence in practice of objectivity, professionalism and accuracy in race

reporting, although they urged the need for 'critical coverage' of the National Front and other

racist groups (see Appendix E). The possibility of monitoring television's treatment of race

was also registered by the newly-formed Campaign for Racial Equality (CRE), which also

emphasised the role of the media in forming and re-forming attitudes on different ethnic

communities.[7] The CRE issued a statement which assured that it would use,

> ...the media and all other channels of communication not just to counter the
>
> racialist doctrines of various extremists but also to stimulate more serious
>
> public discussion of the issues and problems associated with the development
>
> of a multiracial community and to widen public understanding of the
>
> contribution made by ethnic minorities to the economic and cultural life of
>
> the nation. (Cited in Myant in Frachon and Vargaftig, 1995:41)

A detailed CRE report followed which examined the ways in which race was reported in the

1970s and the role of the media in shaping attitudes towards race relations and black

communities (Troyna, 1981). The study focused in detail on the impact and role of the local

media as a source of information and the ways in which the National Front were depicted in

the media. Troyna concluded that television was 'an important source of information and

interpretation about 'race relations'' (Troyna, 1981:79), particularly for those White people

who rarely came into contact with 'real' Black people. In addition, he argued that

representations of 'race relations' were mostly framed around conflict, the National Front,

White hostility and crime rather than around issues such as education, employment, health and

resources (Troyna, 1981:80).

Some NUJ members argued that professionalism was not necessarily the problem, but rather

the *way* in which 'objectivity' was manipulated in news presentation to reflect racist

ideologies. The NUJ's concern with the way in which race is reported emerged in the 1970s as

an extension of Clause 10 of the Union's Code of Professional Conduct. The NUJ produced

detailed directives such as the need for equal opportunities in the media in order to seek wider

and better coverage of Black affairs and to avoid instances of adjectival racism. The NUJ

drafted four guidelines on reporting fascism in their 1978 Annual conference (see Appendix E).

These guidelines were to apply to all sectors of the media, including those working in

television and radio. But as with most ameliorative broadcasting policies on race, although

well-meaning, they were not only often difficult to implement, but easy to dodge. The

directives also pointed to the tension, as MacShane pointed out, between 'talking simply of

'raising professional standards' and admitting openly that the intervention is political and

inviting journalists to consider the political role they play in reporting racist issues'

(MacShane, 1979:91).

As well as these interventions made by the NUJ and CRE, there were, as I began to outline in

Chapters 1 and 2, a set of debates and issues about media bias and access raised by CARM, ·

CCCS and the Leicester Centre for Mass Communications Research. The extensive work of

the Glasgow Media Group during the 1970s and 1980s, was particularly important for

deconstructing what they saw as clear evidence of bias in news and current affairs reporting

(GUMG, 1976, 1980, 1982, 1985). Their general argument was that there is pressure on

broadcast journalists to put over the 'establishment' line and that there is a strong right wing

bias and lack of causal explanation in a lot of news reportage (Glasgow University Media

Group, 1985). The Glasgow Media Group concluded that there can be no objective, unbiased

news reporting and that the media establish the agenda and public philosophy for us at a

primary level.

b) Reporting the National Front in the 1970s

We saw in Chapter 1 how television documentaries on race during the 1950s and 1960s often

maintained an aura of liberal balance, even when they presented the 'extreme' viewpoints of

others, most notably Enoch Powell. This is useful to note when we consider television's

treatment of extreme Right groups such as the National Front (NF) and British National Party

(BNP). Since its formulation in 1967, the National Front began to use the British media to

transmit not simply pro-British, but 'anti-immigrant' sentiment. In April 1967, the NF put

forward candidates for the Greater London Council elections, highlighting the party's 'official'

place in British politics from the outset. In the run-up to the 1974 General Election, the NF's

Chairman, John Tyndall, tapped into the power of the media in mobilising support for the

NF's race politics by insisting that, 'every opportunity to cultivate the mass media, and

particularly the press should be exploited' (Tyndall,*Spearhead*, 1974:76).[8] Granted a Party

Political Broadcast on television, the National Activities Organiser of the NF, Martin Webster,

boasted, 'We are laughing all the way to the bank. Where else can you get simultaneous five

minute broadcasts on the BBC and the ITV for thirteen and a half grand?' (Webster, *The*

Guardian, 12.10.74).

We can see then that the liberal premise of British broadcasting to support freedom of speech, democracy and tolerance was stretched so as to access the voice of the extreme Right. Television, more so than other mediums such as the press, considered that what constituted 'good news journalism', was 'non-interference' by the State, with TV simply acting as a relayer of different viewpoints. Charles Curran for example (who replaced Sir Hugh Greene as the BBC Director General in 1969), interpreted 'professionalism' as treating the National Front and other factions exactly like any other political party. The NF's race politics in the 1970s were thus treated as legitimate, if extreme, views and coverage of the NF and their opponents as equally extreme on opposite sides. As such, *both* were generally lumped together by the media as constituting the 'race relations problem' *per se*. Troyna notes how, while 'Black Hostility' generated wide discussions about 'race relations', 'White Hostility' triggered debates about 'freedom of speech' thus obscuring the real issue of the NF's race politics (Troyna, 1981:82). Unlike television's 'hands-off' approach, the British press sometimes accommodated more critical and analytical (be it oppositional or favourable) opinion on the National Front and their exposure (e.g.'The 'Menace' of the Front', *Daily Mirror*, 4.11.77). The accepted practice of press partiality at least warranted open critiques of the NF (although the press also generally operate within a narrow repertoire of positions on 'race') compared to television's strained attempts to remain aggressively neutral.[9] However, following the pre-General Election disturbances in Southall in 1979, the *Manchester Evening News* claimed that the National Front, 'has as much right as any other political party to hold meetings - particularly during a General Election campaign. That right must be defended - to bow to mob rule would be a disastrous mistake' (*Manchester Evening News*, 24.4.79). The previous year, *The Times* stated that 'The Socialist Workers Party shares with the National Front a desire to

subvert established democratic values' (*The Times*, 18.2.78). Meanwhile, the NF assembled

considerable support (in 1977, they put up candidates in 92 GLC constituencies).

Just as the NF decided from the outset that television was central in legitimising and

publicising its anti-Black campaign, so television established its *laissez-aller* treatment of the

extreme Right. Stuart Hall has pointed to this in relation to **Nationwide's** coverage of the anti-

racist demonstration in Southall (23.4.79) (see Chapter 1). He describes how news coverage

positioned the Anti-Nazi League and the National Front as two equal extremes:

> This is the classic logic of television, where the medium identifies itself with
>
> the moderate, consensual, middle-road, Average viewer, and sets off, in
>
> contrast, extremism on both sides, which it then equates with each other. In
>
> this particular exercise in 'balance', fascism and anti-fascism are represented
>
> as *the same* - both equally *bad*, because the Middle Way enshrines the
>
> Common Good under all circumstances. (Hall, 1981:45)

The setting up of two oppositional camps who were 'against something' (i.e. against fascism

and against the non-English respectively), implied that both were equally negative

campaigners.[10] It also ensured a dramatic structure in which the news professionals could play

them off against each other, with itself as the nonpartisan third party and the camera as

passive observer. But while television news attempted to hold notions of 'parliamentary

democracy' in place, *it* defined what should be deemed democratic. Of course, there was little

evidence of a pro-National Front bias, but the fact remained that the party was quite clearly

legitimised by television; treated 'within the formally constituted boundaries of parliamentary

democracy and therefore entitled to the rights and privileges of that political system, freedom

of assembly, freedom to march, and so on' (Troyna, 1981:81).

c) Reporting the Extreme Right in the 1990s

These issues have persisted into the 1990s. A number of questions around balance,

impartiality and nationalism were foregrounded in the run-up to the 1997 General Election (the

European Commission's European Year Against Racism). The week prior to the election saw,

on the one hand, the frantic vying for Black votes by Tony Blair, Paddy Ashdown and John

Major (the heads of the three leading British political parties), alongside their tenacious

investment in populist emblems of the British nation. Where the Conservative Party adopted

Jim Davidson as their preferred symbol, the Labour Party chose the British Bulldog as theirs.

Meanwhile, the British National Party were granted uncritical access to several minutes of

peak-time viewing to convince the British nation of the need to cleanse the country of racial

'outsiders.'

The BNP broadcast (Tx:25.4.97) began with John Tyndall's (the BNP's figurehead) plea that,

"We must stop immigration and help immigrants to return home." The BNP clearly attempted

to dodge direct accusations of the use of racist rhetoric by letting the visuals do a lot of the

work. (Of course, modes of visual communication, although often seen as uncoded and

unproblematic, are often as arbitrary in form as verbal communication.) The emotive

juxtaposition of the iconography of the British nation (white cliffs, the House of Commons)

with key 'ethnic' signifiers (mosques, Black people walking aimlessly down London streets)

was accompanied by Tyndall's words, "The floodgates have been opened. Is this what our

war heroes fought for?" The broadcast adopted an exclusionary 'our', while playing on certain

popular racist myths which: 1) nullify the presence of Black people in the war effort; 2) rest

on the logic that immigration will leave more money and resources for the 'authentic' members

of the British public; 3) compare a disordered present with a civilised and pure past; and 4) locate immigration as an exclusively Black thing, and so on.

There had been mild protests prior to the screening of the political broadcast (on 22 April, 1997, a handful of members of the Anti-Nazi League campaigned outside the Channel 4 building and later that week continued a 'Pull the Plugs on the BNP' protest), but there was no mention of this opposition on terrestrial news channels that day (although it was briefly covered on Channel One's cable news). It was only after the broadcast had been screened, that there was some brief criticism in a handful of newspapers about the decision by four television channels to grant the BNP such privileged access. The BNP Party Political Broadcast was aired on BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 5. Channel 4 eventually decided not to screen it. But that Channel 4 saw fit to refuse the airing of the broadcast was not as much a cause for celebration as one might have hoped. Initially, even the fact that Channel 4 (with its role as an alternative public sphere and special remit to cater for Britain's ethnic minorities), seemed slow to decide not to screen the broadcast was, for some, cause for concern. But then it gradually unfolded that the decision was not actually based on a moral/ethical judgment, but on the fact that the broadcast was untransmittable under ITC guidelines which required the consent from members of the public who appear in a broadcast. Because the BNP could, for obvious reasons, not get this consent, Channel 4 requested an edited version which the BNP failed to deliver in time for the scheduled screening. Meanwhile, the other channels each put out different versions of it (the BBC screened the original BNP broadcast, LWT made some alterations 'for legal reasons' and Channel 5 made necessary changes on behalf of the BNP). The BBC defended its decision by maintaining that essentially, 'the BBC is publisher' and that the broadcast did not 'impinge the law or the channel's guidelines' (Right To Reply, Channel

4, Tx:3.5.97).

Interestingly, the previous day's Prolife Alliance broadcast had been banned by the BBC on the grounds of it being against 'taste and decency', but as Mark Lawson commented, 'It seems a confused culture in which a campaign broadcast is not allowed to show what does happen to foetuses but a man is permitted to say what he would like to happen to non-White people' (Lawson,*The Guardian*, 16.4.97:5). What the airing of the broadcast made clear, was that despite certain regulatory policies which command degrees of objectivity and cultural sensitivity in television news and current affairs, broadcasting channels do have a considerable degree of autonomy and can exercise their editorial control *when they see fit*. Moreover, these policies do not entirely eradicate peak-time access for racist viewpoints. Indeed, if we compare the professional ideologies and definitions of democracy in 1979 with today's, then they do not appear to have substantially altered. Blacks, when they speak their mind on British race relations, are often depicted as 'confrontational', while the NF, BNP et al are simply seen as 'opinionated'. The common-sense ideal that if we want a free country, then today's British National Party are as legitimate political spokes-people as Black political activists, remains widespread across the broadcasting sector. Indeed, few would disagree with the impeccable liberal credentials of the 'freedom of speech' hypothesis. I would argue, however, that it is also the responsibility of broadcasters to ask with what exceptions, to what degree it should be applied, and question whether it should always override all other factors. Surely there is a contradiction between 1) the fact that if you field enough candidates and can afford the £15,000 deposit, you can get a five minute television broadcast whatever you plan to say, and 2) the ITC's general observations of taste and decency and their insistence (at least on paper) that material cannot be aired if it is offensive to public feeling or incites crime/disorder. News

programming, especially when governed by the special conditions of electoral broadcasting, has

not yet adequately resolved this contradiction.

d) Attempts at Redressing the News Balance

The question of policy is particularly relevant in the context of news and current affairs,

because it is here, more than anywhere else, that notions of professionalism and balance are

consolidated in television. The 1990s have indeed seen some attempts at redressing news bias

in relation to 'race'. In 1996, the BBC announced that it was to exercise monitoring to ensure

'fair representation' in news and current affairs output. The BBC Staff Circular entitled

'Editorial Objectives: Fair Representation on Air' stated:

> Editors and production staff [are] to take on board the interests, concerns and
>
> sensitivities of under-represented groups when establishing news values. This
>
> is to be informed by taking specialist press (Black and Asian newspapers, gay
>
> press etc) as a regular part of programmes' newspaper orders. (Cited in *Daily*
>
> *Mail*, 13.6.96:6)

The BBC Director-General, John Birt, who initiated the scheme, suggested that as well as

using the Black press to broaden the repertoire of news stories selected by editors, BBC staff

needed to fill in monitoring forms detailing the age, sex and ethnic origin of those interviewed.

Birt's mission, although perhaps a little misguided in focusing on the quantity, not *quality* of

representations of Black people in news, at least represented an attempt to reduce news bias.

The initiative however, was derided by many (especially the 'right wing' press, e.g. 'Big

Brother BBC', *Daily Mail*, 13.6.96), who saw it as an overly politically correct gesture and an

unnecessary concession, as well as a laborious and tedious exercise to implement. Angela

Lambert provided *Daily Mail* readers with this 'post-PC' rhetoric:

Why stop there? Why not make sure that people with beards are statistically

accurately represented?...As far as representing minorities goes, there seems

to be an adequate number on our screens and in the arts already...This would

produce a world no less mad than the one that currently exists in Birt's

chilling and dangerous vision. (*Daily Mail,* 13.6.96:6)

One senior BBC journalist commented on John Birt's quest as,

... barmy. Editors are fed up with the sheer volume of endless form-filling.

There's no time to edit programmes...a sop to the politically correct version

of life. What on earth has this to do with the coverage of stories where there's

no particular racial angle. (*Daily Mail*, 13.6.96:6)

Of course, the fact that 'Englishness' is itself a racial angle itself was overlooked here, as was

the fact that Black people can and do hold opinion on *all* news stories. Tory MP, Peter Butler,

argued that Birt's policy 'can only lead to distortion in coverage. I would rather see political

balance than ethnic balance'.

Another BBC initiative designed to broaden existing news provisions for Black audiences, is

Black Britain (BBC2, 7.96 -), which claims to be 'a programme for black people and not

about them'. Its first series was promoted with the slogan, 'When news matters, it matters

where you get your news'. With non-terrestrial news alternatives such as CNN and Zee TV

News expanding, **Black Britain,** a 26-weekly news service for Black viewers presented by

Rianna Scipio, operates as the only terrestrial Black news provision service. Patrick Younge,

the producer of the series, claims that, 'Research showed Afro-Caribbean and African viewers

were almost a lost audience. They want to see proper coverage in the mainstream news, not

just when Linford Christie wins the 100 metres' (Younge,*The Daily Telegraph,* 10.6.96:8).

Pilot groups were set up to 'market test' what Black audiences would want from the series.

Younge argues that a specifically Black news service is needed:

> Black people in the news are pimps, muggers, prostitutes, victims. You
>
> never see black people in the news unless it is a 'black story'. This is the
>
> problem that black people wanted sorted out most. But they also accept that
>
> they have stories that other people may not be as interested in as they are.
>
> *(Black Film Bulletin,* Autumn, 1996:5)

Black Britain, although a Black magazine programme like **Ebony** and **Black on Black,** differs

from its antecedents in that it is produced out of BBC News and Current Affairs rather than

from the Multicultural Programming Unit, which often suffers poor resources and low budgets.

Together with the boosted funding, the series has a naturalistic studio setting (rather than the

sci-fi ones which the ITN and BBC news set designers have favoured in recent years),

alongside mostly Black reporters who are involved in the construction of the stories. This

makes for a more integrated form of Black news production. Despite its undesirable scheduling

(against **Eastenders**) the series is given between £72-73,000 per episode (about the same as

'mainstream' news magazine programmes such as **Here and Now** which Younge went on to

produce) and so it is refreshing to see that the BBC appear to have invested in setting up a

news alternative.[11]

e) The Enunciators - Black News Presenters

So far we have been looking at news images and news values, but we also need to address the

matter of news presentation - or more specifically, news presenters - since they form an

integral part of how we all understand and interpret news. The most obvious way in which

television news maintains its liberal facade in relation to questions of race in general, and Black

people in particular, is through the use of Black newscasters, of which, since the 1980s, there

have been an increasing number. Many Black news-journalists can be seen on local/regional

news and many others have excelled in the network news arena (e.g.Wesley Kerr, George

Alagiah, Zeinab Badawi, Shahnaz Pakravan, Moira Stewart, Anya Sitaram, Krishnan Guru-

Murthy).[12] In addition, some of the most high-ranking Black executives and personalities in

British broadcasting (Trevor Phillips, Trevor McDonald, Samir Shah) are involved in News &

Current Affairs. The symbolic status of such trusted roles is important, as is the regularity

with which Black newscasters are seen on our screens. Where Black people continue to be

under-represented in news however, is at a strategic level (making coverage decisions and

interacting with minority communities), which is arguably where it counts the most in terms of

shaping representation. The fact is that those key Black players in news and current affairs

departments are not enough in themselves to guarantee fair and accurate representation across

all news programming, although they are routinely used as a measure of Black success in the

genre. As the Aston Research presented at the 1996 CRE 'Channels of Diversity' conference

informed us, Trevor McDonald takes up 3% of the number of representations of ethnic

minorities on British television! (Cumberbatch & Woods, 1996).[13] But as Herman Ouseley,

Chairman of the CRE, noted:

> Trevor McDonald appearing several times over is counted as 'ethnic minority
>
> representation', and that is seen as a symbol of ethnic minority success. That
>
> is how it's often evaluated, and thrown back at ethnic minorities who are
>
> campaigning for equality and justice. So we are given the erstwhile chairman
>
> of the 'Better English' campaign [Trevor McDonald] as our sole role model.
>
> (Ouseley, CRE, 1996:30; my addition)

We also need to consider how these newscasters are looked upon and ask what impact their

professional role has on how their racial identity is viewed. Black newsreaders, like all

newsreaders, present themselves in as neutral a way as the job demands. Given the character of

news presentation, Black news presenters are 'depoliticised', so that they can appear 'racially

neutral'. They are not necessarily considered as representative of the Black community at

large. Black newscasters, however welcome, also represent 'exceptional talent' compared to

the more general view of Black people contained within the news stories they deliver. To this

degree, they each (the enunciators and the enunciated) have different relationships to the ways

in which 'Blackness' is determined. Channel 4 newscaster, Zeinab Badawi, has argued that,

'As far as working in television goes, I am treated as an insider - foreign, but so Anglicised that

I could be regarded as British (Badawi in Twitchin, 1988:133). In news, perhaps more than in

other sectors of programming, Black television figures are not loaded with the burden of having

to deal with 'Black issues.' Trevor McDonald (ITN's news anchor and Britain's most popular

news presenter) is not expected to express someone's viewpoint 'from somewhere', or to act

as the embodiment of all the Black people he mentions in the news report. He is *outside* that

experience - *beyond* it, in fact. His role is to 'represent' in the sense of describing

someone's/thing's experience. He does not speak *for* Black people, he speaks *about* them -

without having to carry Mercer's oft-cited 'burden of representation' (Mercer, 1994:81). (See

Chapter 1 for different definitions of 'representation'.)

Section 3: The Enunciated/ News Representations of 'Blackness'

Stories are governed by a set of unwritten rules acquired by all storytellers

and receivers, much the way we all acquire the basic rules of grammar. (Sarah

Ruth Kozloff)

In this section, I want to use a more text-based approach to examine some of the key ways in

which Black people have been represented in television news. What I aim to demonstrate, through the use of selected case studies, is an extension of my argument in Chapters 2 and 3, that Black people in actuality programmes have generally been depicted in relation to 'problems' such as immigration and cultural difference. I will go on to argue that Black people in news images have recurrently been located at the heart of crisis and that this crisis has been denoted primarily through the use of classic motifs and narratives of 'Blackness'. The codes of these raced narratives 'create a kind of network, a *topos* [location] through which the entire text passes (or rather, in passing, becomes text)' (Barthes, 1990; my addition). Stuart Hall explains:

> Blacks become the bearers, the signifiers, of the crisis of British society in the
> 70s: racism is its 'final solution'...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, 1978:31-32)

The two symbols of crisis which I have chosen to focus on - the Black male criminal and the dependent victim abroad - both incite panic and denote catastrophe, the motor of news narratives. Although, this second image relates specifically to foreign news coverage, I would argue that it is also one of the most consistent and potent images of Black people that British television audiences have grown accustomed to seeing. Furthermore, the image of starving, helpless Black sufferers, dependent on the West to break out of a cycle of crisis is, as I will go on to argue, not disconnected from images closer to home; particularly from those of Black youth in Britain and their involvement in 'urban unrest' and other versions of crime. Both images are connected to issues of poverty, youth (although in the case of the hungry in Africa, the word most often used is 'children'), and to the familiar binary oppositions between

normality and deviance, civilisation and barbarity, civil disorder and cultural etiquette.[14] The

two images I have chosen, are also important for the regularity with which they have appeared

on television news (Sudan, Ethiopia, Rwanda & Notting Hill, Southall, Brixton X 2 St.

Paul's/Bristol, Handsworth, Bradford), so that they have become identified with the 'core' of

Black people's essence. The familiarity of these parables and the representational language

through which they are told, has helped to cement them as fact, and they have, in turn, become

unerasable. Moreover, the relationship between the events and the subjects involved, has

actively formed the impression that the connection is self-evident and intrinsic; serving to

standardise, naturalise and administer the dialogic balance of race reporting played out on our

screens.

a) News Presentation of 'Race Riots': Black Youth/Black Crime = News (The British Context)

I will begin with the image of crime and disorder, which has come to be deeply associated with

British 'race relations' and more specifically with 'Blackness'. The image of the Black man as

rioter can be considered as an extension of the myth of savagery cultivated in the nineteenth

century. The traditional image of the Wild Man was developed in biblical times and was

associated with the wilds, the jungle, the forest - untamed land. But as Hadyn White argues,

'As one after another of these wildernesses was brought under control, the idea of the Wild

Man was progressively despatialized. This despacialization was attended by a compensatory

process of psychic interiorization' (White, 1972:7)· Thus, the focus shifted from the

environment to the *individual*. Just as the wild land was seen to need order, the Black man who

was assumed to be naturally placed in it (especially Africa), was thought to need a civilising

force. Since the sixteenth century, connections have been made between Black people and

Nature/savages/animals; the 'science' of race came later (see Chapter 7 for more on 'scientific'

mythologies around race). Missionaries were the primary 'civilising force' needed to bring order to the Black man who, according to Hegel, has no history (Hegel in Dubrunner, 1979:301).

The connections between this early imagery of Black people as wild, untamed, savage and the modern image of the Black man as aggressive and violent are evident. In recent times, the early mythology has developed in terms of the fixed link between Black men and violent behaviour. Indeed, the association between race and riots has developed in two main senses: the first, is Black people's *physical* involvement in civil disturbances; the second, is the *ideological* link which makes sense of Blackness *through* the 'riots' and comprehends the riots through Blackness. 'Civilisation' has been culturally aligned with 'social order' - and it is to this, that Black people have dominantly been presented as a threat. If civilisation is the state we have cultivated in order to protect ourselves from dangers and fears, and if 'social order' is part of that, then Black people have been imagined as those who potentially jeopardise its accomplishment; and in that sense constitute a 'menace to society'. Thus, when the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir David McNee, told anti-Nazi protesters (many of whom were of course White) following the 1979 Southall riot and Blair Peach's death, "If you keep off the streets in London and behave yourselves, you won't have the SPG [Special Patrol Group] to worry about", he was saying something more general about the way in which British 'social order' operates in relation to the Black presence.

In the 1960s, aspects of the British state (particularly the media, law and police) actively began to construct and work with the definition of 'Black youth' which, since then, has become a distinctive social and cultural category. Fisher and Joshua described this as:

primarily intended for a special class of West Indian youngsters, usually in

conflict with their parents' generation; 'often kicked out of their 'homes';

'who do not register for work, who are aimless, rootless drifters; concerned

with "hustling" for a living...; (in) 'culture conflict', 'alienated' and 'adrift

from society' and 'from the instruments of law and order'. (Fisher and Joshua

in Cashmore and Troyna, 1982)

The media's preoccupation with 'youth as trouble' was, of course, nothing new (see Chapters

3 and 6), although it was in the 1970s that this took on a specifically 'racial' angle with the

image of the street criminal and inner-city rioter. The familiar narrative through which youth

were understood as symptomatic of a general national decline took the form of a 'cycle of

deprivation' thesis based on poor family relations, urban decline, unemployment, generational

conflict etc; signalling an erosion of traditional values and standards of living.[15] Although

many of these readings of the Black youth pathology appeared to be 'liberal' and vaguely

humanitarian in their emphasis on social conditions, economic insecurity and 'enforced idleness

because of unemployment' (Scarman, 1981:14), they were, in fact, similar to the traditional

social problem myth in that they largely located the problem *within* Black communities

themselves (Gutzmore in Sivanandan, 1983:29). The root of the problem was still dominantly

contained within the grouping ('Black youth') and within their locality, the Black family or

neighbourhood. Moreover, there was an implicit emphasis both in media representations and

amongst some sociologists (Cashmore and Troyna, 1982) on inter-generational conflict, gangs,

'street culture', thus collapsing 'race' into 'culture', 'racism' into 'disadvantage'. As George

Fisher and Harry Joshua note, it is these areas of focus related to the reproduction of culture

(such as language, family, cultural values etc) that are the prime 'targets for racist state

intervention' (Lawrence in Sivanandan, 1983:98).

The image of Black violent youth has also been dependent, like many of the myths which have

circulated around young British Asians, on the thesis of 'in-betweenness' (see Chapters 2 and

3). Van Loon points to this 'double *liminal*[threshold] existentiality' (Van Loon, 1995; my

addition) in delineations of modern Black youth; the first the liminality of *youth* and the second

of *Blackness*. Black youth are assumed to find themselves in a confused in-between state -

primitive (the inhuman Wild Man), but modern (young, new, misplaced in urban Western

environments); at the crossroads between progress and backwardness, motion and stasis,

modernity and tradition, the beginning and end of civilisation... (Hartley, 1992). Violence is

assumed to represent their struggle to be complete (reacting against a state that stunts their

growth), both as adults and as national members/citizens. In moments of violence they are

assumed to own 'in-betweenness' both culturally and generationally. This dual codification

denotes crisis with the double capacity to signal catastrophe. When it comes to violent action

against the social order, psychical lack manifests itself in physical forms of excess (violence,

aggression etc.). The onus is on the Black individual to cope in the West, to 'assimilate' and

'integrate', while the English are only required to 'tolerate'.[16]

(i) Covering the 1981 Race Riots

In the early 1980s, the coverage of 'social violence' in British urban centres was extensive,

playing a crucial role in shaping popular perceptions of British race relations (see Chapter 1 on

the key causes and effects of the rebellions). News editors emphasised the serious and

unprecedented character of the disturbances, and news editions were routinely extended. For

example, between 4.7.81 and 16.7.81, the BBC and ITN covered the Toxteth, Brixton and

Southall riots for all thirteen days amounting to twenty-six reports. Coverage varied from

approximately five to thirty-three minutes on any one day (Tumber, 1982:35; See Appendix

F). Regional coverage of the riots varied greatly according to guidelines, local disputes and

working agreements, as well as to the amorphous and live character of the riots themselves

(Tumber, 1982:22). But more than at any other time in Britain's post-war history, the 1981

riots were *television* riots. Lord Scarman, who was asked by the Home Secretary to report on

the April 1981 disturbances in Brixton, pointed out how the civil unrest had been 'captured'

on television:

> The British people watched with horror and incredulity an instant audio-
>
> visual presentation on their television sets of scenes of violence and disorder
>
> in the "capital city" the like of which has not previously been seen in this
>
> century of Britain. These young people brought about a temporary collapse of
>
> law and order in the centre of an inner suburb of London (Scarman, 1981,
>
> Cmnd 8427:1).

But how was what for many was a 'rebellion' against civic inequality and state racism,

transformed into the dominant news image of a 'riot' which threatened society's 'status quo'?

Well this was partially through the selective news production process, which attempted to

'make sense' out of something which it presented as chaotic. Of course, there were also certain

pressures for news-journalists to provide 'a good story', while always working through the

ideological framework of news liberalism and impartiality. Although the riots could be used as

a dramatic news story, news editors were also under huge pressures to 'ensure balance and

coverage of disorder' (Scarman, 1981:111) while also facing the problem of getting access to

information from both the police (who were cautious about how their public image would

stand) and the rioters (who were often concerned about how that information would be used,

and who were generally reluctant to open themselves up to a media which they were used to

seeing juggle around the facts to tell the same story).

Indeed, news narratives of the riots tended to use a standardised approach which depended on the rationale of Black disaffected youth *despite* Britain's dominant tolerance of her ethnic minorities.[17] Little was said about the root causes of the riots (see Chapter 1). The dysfunctional situation of Black youth and their reaction against the state through violent means was emphasised. Meanwhile, police harassment (e.g. the use of CS gas and discriminatory urban policing methods) both during and prior to the riots was generally overlooked. Black people were frequently referred to as 'immigrants'; the supposed 'aftercare' from concerned politicians was regularly filmed to provide the 'visit to the area' story (although some suggested that Margaret Thatcher, William Whitelaw and Timothy Raison 'only go to the police station - on television it looks as though they go everywhere', quoted in Tumber, 1982:13)). Most of all, the pseudo-scientific conjecture about why the riots had happened were only developed by some and only in hindsight - after the event - when the inner city became interesting.

Because of the live nature of the riots, there was also pressure on news journalists to actively 'hunt out' trouble and linger in those areas where they forecast outbreaks of disorder. In this sense, there were clear indications that, once the first riots happened, journalists depended more on anticipating trouble and 'news interest', than on the events themselves in order to sustain the story. Following the coverage of the 1981 riots, there were accusations that the broadcast media had consciously staged some events to give them a better story - paying Black people to put a camera in their homes, asking them to throw petrol bombs for the camera, and so on (see Tumber, 1982:11-14). In relation to the battle to get the 'best riots story', one

senior editor argued that, 'It's the company that has had the better riot that wins because they have had visually more dramatic pictures. It's the quality of the event that wins not its coverage' (quoted in Tumber, 1982:27). But when the day's events hadn't provided sufficient levels of 'quality' footage, a provocative line of enquiry was often assumed. For example, an edition of ITN's **News At Ten** in the midst of the summer riot, carried the headline, 'Was Someone Directing The Riots?' (ITV, Tx:7.7.81). The report proceeded to identify briefly someone who they claimed *may* have engineered the Toxteth riots. Not only was this leading news story based on unsubstantiated evidence, but it represented a blatant attempt to simplify the complex causes of 'social violence' by locating one root cause (McNay, *Television*, Sept/Oct, 1981:15). Another news convention which was routinely used, was the 'live from the scene' report, although this was often for no apparent reason since there was usually no live action to be captured (of course, it is rare for the news itself to be 'on the scene of the crime').[18] What the live report did offer however, was a sense of urgency and 'visual evidence' of the 'aftermath' of the riots.

Some expressed concern that television could have done more to contextualise the riots (Allan, *The Times*, 25.7.81), while others (such as Mary Whitehouse) feared that the graphic visualising of events would encourage 'copycat effects'.[19] Many of the debates around the 1981 television coverage of the riots did not focus on the problem of selective reporting, but centred on the 'social effects' and imitative behaviour as a result of televising violence. Although there was no direct evidence of this, both the BBC and ITN news editors agreed that there would inevitably be some 'copycat effect' (Tumber, 1982:11). There was less obvious concern that the images of predominantly Black rioters appeared to accentuate the divide between 'fact' and 'opinion' (Hall in Hall et al., 1978:58). One especially overbearing image

which triggered numerous discussions about the riots, was of a young Black boy kicking a shop window and then stealing a pair of boots from it (Tx:10.7.81). Although there might have been 'truth' in the image, without accompanying analysis or detailed commentary *over time*, this single image only spoke a selective, albeit compelling truth. The coercive myth that if the news camera shows us something then it must be true, undoubtedly contributed to a narrow encoding of 'the whole story'. As Verma has argued:

> The problem central to the medium is that, by its nature, it is capable of creating very potent images which convey very powerful messages but that these images cannot readily be placed in a rational context within the news programme in which they are first presented. (Verma in Twitchin, 1988:127)

(ii) News Coverage of British 'Race Relations' in 1995

Just as 1981 was a watershed year with respect to matters of 'race', 1995 was significant for reintroducing the issue of race and crime to the top of British news agendas. On 8 May, Brian Douglas died in police custody; in June 1995 a local street football match in Manningham, Bradford, turned into several nights of civil disorder; on 14 June, three police officers were acquitted in the Joy Gardner case; on 7 July, the Metropolitan Chief Commissioner, Paul Condon, suggested that the majority of muggers were Black; and December witnessed riots in Brixton. The image of Black youth and crime once again impinged itself on the British television (news) nation. For one Talk Radio caller (17.6.95), this was another sign that 'the multicultural experiment' as he called it, simply was not working - and this appeared to be a view shared by many. I want to briefly comment on the coverage of three of these events (the Bradford disturbances, Paul Condon's justification of intensified police programmes to solve the 'Black mugger' problem, and the Brixton riots).

1.The Bradford Riots:

To build on my discussion in Chapter 3 about representations of British-Muslims, British-

Asian identity and Islamaphobia, I want to briefly look at the news coverage of the Bradford-

based disturbances in July 1995. The main objects of discussion here were not exclusively

'Black youth' (the media's unofficial but general term for young African-Caribbean men), but

young British-Asians who, particularly following the Bradford disturbances of the summer of

1995, were lumped into the category of 'Britain's newest trouble-makers.' We saw in

Chapters 2 and 3 that, while Asians on British television were often seen to denote crisis in

terms of 'cultural difference' and 'numbers', the image of their passivity was also a feature of

their representation. So that for example, while many young Asians (and indeed White people)

had also been involved in the 1980s riots, this was rarely acknowledged by the media. But we

also saw that in the mid-1990s, a new scapegoat was invented in the British-Asian as social

deviant or underachiever and that this was specifically related to British-Muslims in various

documentary programmes. It is useful to note what Hall et al have called 'the 'generative and

associative' effect of new labels' when we consider the dramatic structure through which

'factual' representations of the 1995 Bradford riots operated in such a way as to reveal

connections between old and new images of the British Muslim diaspora (Hall in Hall et al.,

1978:72).

The news coverage of the Bradford riots put great emphasis on religion, a breakdown in family

ties and community relations, and the effects of Muslim pride. In so doing, it both rehashed

and remodelled the ways in which the riot narratives of the 1980s had dominantly been

constructed. Like the 1980s riot news reports, most coverage of the Manningham disturbances

failed to situate the events within the wider political and cultural context.[20] For example,

considerations of what Bikhu Parekh has called, "the law of the third generation" (a

reinvestment in 'Islam' as a badge of identity for many young Muslims) against the wider

political backdrop of 'Islam' as a key emblem of threat in 1990s Western Europe was never

offered or explored (Parekh, cited from **Outside In: Muslims in Europe**, BBC2, OU,

Tx:12.5.97).

2. Paul Condon and Operation Eagle Eye:

News on violent crime serves to clarify society's moral framework; of what is (un)acceptable

for the 'moral majority' and in the 'interests of the public'. Crime news is therefore assumed

to safeguard 'our' moral values and define the health of 'our' society; thus, the 'increase in

crime means...', 'latest crime figures suggest...'. In representations of crime, the collapsing of

terms has been so powerful that it has translated itself not only into our understanding of why

crime happens but also into official policy. Policy is not fixed but organic, reacting to change

and to assumptions of why those shifts have occurred (e.g. increase in mugging; constructed

connection between Black youth and mugging by the state apparatus).[21] Paul Condon, whose

statements about the preponderance of Black muggers I referred to above, went on to devise

'Operation Eagle Eye', which was designed to solve the problem of what has been described

as 'the most vicious of crimes' and defended it as a necessary reaction to statistics which

apparently suggested the link between Black people and mugging.[22] Thus, Condon's statement

that, 'many of the perpetrators are very young Black people...' (**Black Britain**, BBC2,

Tx:30.7.96) and, 'At the end of the day, we've got to react to the facts...' (**London Tonight**,

Carlton, Tx:2.8.96), substantiated and relied upon the common-sensical link between Black

youth, crime and statistics. News coverage around Operation Eagle Eye was always

constructed in terms of authority (the ubiquitous Paul Condon as official spokesman of the

Metropolitan Police) Vs. anonymity (any Black youth); fact (racially coded statistics) Vs.

sentiment ('Black community' angry about being called muggers). The overall impression we

were invited to share was that Condon was simply doing his job, and that although many

Blacks might resent the finger being pointed at their communities, they had to accept 'the

facts' (Blacks = social problem = trouble = solution needed).[23] Interestingly, what accentuated

the link between Black people and 'mugging', was the fact that it was discussed in those terms

at all, while the racial profile of other types of crimes was not considered worthy of attention,

Thus, once again, the question we need to ask, is where did the terms of the debate begin and

where did this lead us in relation to our views on 'race'?

3. The 1995 Brixton Riot:

The relationship between the police and 'Black communities' became a focal point of news

reports about the Brixton riot of 14 December, 1995. The unrest developed from a peaceful,

planned protest against the death of Wayne Douglas in police custody, into what the media

called a 'riot'. Close analysis of the four channels' coverage on the day following the riot,

reveals the similarity with which the race/crime narrative was produced across television news

channels. BBC1 and ITN bulletins were closest in terms of the way they presented their

reports. Both channels constructed riot narratives which were strikingly similar to those which

followed the 1981 Brixton riots. Many of the news reports were administered in line with

traditional narrations of unlawful Black youth. Both BBC2's **Newsnight** and **Channel 4**

News went some way to entering the discussion from a more probing and critical position. The

BBC, ITN and Carlton reports, although they all briefly questioned whether the police had in

some way incited the riot, were all quick to relinquish that line of enquiry. Rather, they

uniformly took the guarded route of resting on what they determined as 'the facts'. While the

riots coverage was selected as very 'TV-able' (thus the extensive reports), it was mostly

recorded after the event had taken place. Both the BBC and ITN emphasised the following

areas:

(a) <u>Images of the riot</u>: looted shops, torched cars and bombed buildings and what they referred to as 'the aftermath' (although some Black people were interviewed speaking against the rioting, only White people were filmed clearing up).

(b) <u>Police efforts</u>: 'The police were trying to regain control - it took them over two hours. The rioters were using mobile phones to communicate with each other. They were now setting buildings on light' (ITN). Both channels focused on the plight of PC Tisshaw, a police officer who had been knocked off his bike, and then cut to a White man who had to 'rescue' him, "I was shouting at them, pleading with them to leave him".

(c) <u>The Home Secretary</u>: (Michael Howard) visit to Brixton the next day ('This evening the Home Secretary made a point of calling at Brixton...he said there could be no excuse for the violence' - BBC).

(d) <u>The Rioters</u>: sprawling and frenzied ('Hundreds of youths went on the rampage' - BBC, 'gangs of predominantly Black youths took to the streets' - ITN)

(e) <u>The views of Sir Paul Condon</u>: "It wasn't Brixton that rioted last night. It was a small minority of thugs and criminals who, *as ever*, looked for any opportunity to embark on criminal enterprise" (my emphasis).

(f) <u>Brixton</u>: Its 'troubled past' and the government investment that has been made in the area since then.

London's regional news programme, **London Tonight**, presented five reports on the Brixton riot in one edition, and chose to label them under the following categories:

(a) '<u>The Battleground</u>': 'Clearly someone from somewhere was planning more than a peaceful

vigil...the first signs of marchers turning into a mob...the first stones and bottles were thrown at the police...for him and his colleagues there was a chant of "Murderers"' and 'The police weren't the only targets; the media were next on the hit-list. **London Tonight's** cameraman was assaulted at knife-point, our engineer sustained rib injuries, the Outside Broadcast van put out of operation...'

(b) 'The Aftermath': 'Once again Brixton has been strained by the hand of violence'.

(c) 'The Heroes of the Brixton Riot': This focused on only one person, PC Tisshaw (the injured policeman), who was filmed in his hospital-bed.

(d) ' The Trigger': This focused on a)Wayne Douglas' violent criminal past (rather than on his unexplained death in police custody); b)*The Voice* newspaper's recent front page story questioning the official verdict on Douglas's death; and c)the 'inflammatory' rhetoric of civil rights activists who had spoken at the protest march.

(e) ' Condon's View': 'In the past, the threat has been - unless you let crime flourish, we will riot. Well no civilised society can tolerate that. There always has to be a balance'.

Now this is clearly 'thesis journalism' (setting up a theory by shaping supporting and selective material around it). Despite its specially-extended edition, **London Tonight** (which of course airs to the region where the 'riot' took place), packaged a complex and messy social occurrence into a similarly sketchy framework. Here, more than anywhere else, the interpretation that White people were both the victims and the heroes of the riot; that Brixton was an innately troubled zone despite government spending programmes (i.e. 'beyond hope'); and that the Black community itself (be it *The Voice* or Douglas or civil rights speakers) were to blame for the riot, was clearly asserted. Furthermore, splitting our understanding of the event into categories which disunited Whites and Blacks, civilians, 'rebels' and 'the

establishment' ('The trigger' = Blacks, The Heroes/Victims = the news production team and White police) was a divisive and conflict-led framework. In addition, there was a) no real explanation of how a peaceful protest suddenly turned into a riot; b) very little focus on the original reason for the protest (Douglas' death as one in a series of Black deaths in police custody); and c) a limit to those who were individualised and accessed to speak from positions of authority (Condon, PC Tisshaw and Howard). These factors all contributed to a predisposed assessment of the total context of the riot.

b) Starving Children and the Notion of Dependency (The Foreign Context)

Some have commented on the British media's commanding and oft-appropriated image of the Black starving child overseas (Hall, 1981, Barry in Twitchin, 1988, Badawi in Twitchin, 1988). This recurring representation of Blackness has been a key feature of foreign news coverage, but one which most obviously touched the 'national consciousness' in the mid-1980s with 'Band Aid' and 'Live Aid'. There have been criticisms recently (often from journalists covering the story) that aid agencies have become more concerned with managing the new-presentation of famine than with managing the crises themselves (Alagiah, 'Hungry for the truth', *The Guardian*, 25, 5, 98:6-7).

Famine is presented as something that happens *elsewhere* but the way Black people are depicted in foreign coverage is not, as I have already begun to argue, always unconnected to images closer to home, or to the ways in which we are invited to understand domestic issues related to race. Indeed, the image of the starving child overseas depends on similar codes to those deployed to represent violent Black-British youth. Both types have the dual function of clarifying (*highlighting* the difference from 'Whiteness') and forming (*constructing* what is to

be considered as different from it) (Gilroy, 1987). Both 'types' share the quality of *lack* (of control, power or responsibility); function *outside the (British) rules of civilisation* and are located at the heart of crisis. Ultimately, the problem of *lack* is seen to lie with the Black person's *inability to cope*. By comparison, White adulthood is dominantly represented as the epitome of 'civilisation' and 'completion'. Young Black Britons are pushed out of nationhood; while those overseas are assumed to be bound by it. As well as reinforcing and constructing a particular perception of the West, these representational codes categorise Black people in relation to exclusion rather than belonging and emphasise their difference and Otherness. In both images, the Black type is represented as the object of paternalism, either in the form of 'welfarism' or 'aid'. Like the image of the nineteenth century savage, the image of dependency is overpoweringly based on *lack* and 'determined by *absences*: the absence, or scarcity of clothing, possessions, attributes or civilisation (Pieterse, 1992:35)· The overriding impression created by both images is of dependency on others - on an accommodating, charitable and ultimately 'liberal' West, both in domestic terms (immigration, multiculturalism, etc.) and international (aid) ones.

The Biafran war in 1967 brought news reports and documentaries (**Lost Shangri-La, ATV,** 1967) on the effects of African decolonisation and Biafra's departure from Nigeria. But the selection of what was considered valuable in terms of British news information was confined to standard interpretations of the African continent. There was an emphasis on conflict between 'tribes' (Hausa and Yoruba Vs. Ibo) and personalities (Gowon Vs. Ojukuwu), thus encouraging an easily-readable, superficial, 'soap opera'-like framing of an actually complex political situation. Barry notes that:

the memory that imposed itself, large and uncompromising, was that of the
starving child, victim of circumstance, locked into an eternal cycle of
dependency...The starving child can be seen as Africa itself, unable to get
beyond childhood, looking to Europe for its salvation. (Barry in Twitchin,
1988:90)

Such images of dependency have repeatedly been a feature of news presentations of Africa and

of wider media campaigning strategies such as Band Aid and Comic Relief/'Red Nose Day'. As

Allison Pearson argues in relation to TV news coverage of 'Third World' stories, 'Other

peoples' tragedies are shamelessly presented as stirring mini-dramas for our catharsis'

(**Without Walls: J'Accuse the News**, Channel 4, 1995). What the foreign failure-stricken

'disaster story' also provides is an essential element of drama, so that audiences are often pre-

warned of the horrors that they are about to see. (An edition of the BBC **9 O'clock News**, for

example, headlined with the Rwandan tragedy and began with Peter Sissons' warning that,

"You may find scenes in this report distressing".) While we are told of Africa's plight through

the eyes and mouths of the West, Africa is fixed into a language ('the violence of language',

Lecercle, 1990), and a logic beyond her control.[24] Africa represents uncultivated land, her

people are history-less, locked into the dependent present of 'their situation'. The importance

of this imagery is further made clear when we consider that it is not only us in the West that

are fed this version of news, but the 'Third World' too, who are often dependent on the

material collated by Western news agencies such as Visnews, Columbia Broadcasting System

Newsfilm and UP-ITN. As such, it is the West that controls the televisual debate on a large-

scale, global basis, although Zeinab Badawi argues that, 'what a British person and what an

African person is likely to consider as good TV coverage of the continent are two different

things' (Badawi in Twitchin, 1988:133-4).[25] It is not surprising, given the enormity of such

crises, that the West, so used to seeing (albeit selectively and only when the media decides to foreground it) the image of a starving Africa, is now experiencing what has been popularly termed 'compassion fatigue'. This is a sense that the exposure to world suffering is simply too much to take in, and has been described as a 'contemporary sickness...nurtured by the speed and plethora of communications that bewilder and disorient' (Shawcross, *The Guardian*, 21.4.89).

In ITN's nightly news coverage (presented by Trevor McDonald) of Rwanda in 1995, the inset (the backdrop image to the left of McDonald's shoulder), was that of an emaciated Black child with large, bewildered eyes against the setting of the Rwandan flag, with 'RWANDA' written in bold underneath. The inset crystallised all that we were meant to assume was relevant; it was intended to be the most revealing of pictures, summarising everything in a snapshot. Through various iconic images (which represent the actual appearance of what they stand for), symbolic logos (which do not actually look like what they stand for) of Blackness were developed. It is useful to call upon Barthes again, who suggested that, 'Pictures...are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analysing or diluting it' (Barthes, 1972). The image of the starving child here, like that of the freeze-frame of the faceless young Black rioter (the inset used in ITN's coverage of the 1992 LA riots for example), slipped between an icon of a specific moment and a general emblem of Blackness.[26] This served to highlight the emphatic duty of the image and, in the context of news representation in general, pointed to the power of symbols in carrying and condensing meaning.

Gajendra Verma has referred to the image of a dying news reporter who was covering the issue

of apartheid in South Africa (June 1986), as a key moment which many viewers subsequently

identified when referring to that time - despite its lack of fit with the wider context. Using this

example, Verma argues that, '...a single image, on the screen for perhaps three or four seconds,

can unconsciously perhaps, inform attitudes towards black people in social and political

contexts far removed from South Africa' (Verma in Twitchin, 1988:126). The image therefore

can be wholly arbitrary to the full context of the situation, but is signposted as *the*

representative moment.[27] A more complete meaning of the story is often realised when we are

given dialogue, but the pictures are anchored as representations which most effectively

crystallise narrative meaning.[28] The 'rhetoric of the image' (Barthes, 1977:32-51) develops

through the reporter's voice-over and style of presentation.

Possibly the best example through which the power of the image of dependency was

demonstrated, was Band Aid (1985). Two of the most profound images it constructed, were

firstly, the sight of starving children and secondly, the image of Bob Geldof (later to be dubbed

"Saint Bob") traipsing through desert sand with small Black children clinging to his side. The

media representation of Band Aid was one which actively *encouraged* a Western sense of

paternalism. Badawi suggests that:

> The great attention it received *exaggerated* the importance of aid in the
>
> developing process of Africa, and tended to confirm a false impression that
>
> Africa's problem can be solved if the West pours lots of charity into it.'Band
>
> Aid' was a spectacle made by the West for the West, and Africa was the
>
> junior partner. (Badawi in Twitchin, 1988:135)

Highly televisual, the 'event' (and it was that - media interest developed well into the famine in

Ethiopia and retracted soon after it felt it had done something) was a huge ratings-success,

while simultaneously soothing the conscience of the West. Most importantly, Band Aid acted as a clarifying process in terms of our notions of what 'us' and 'them' constitute. Television in this instance, became Africa's missionary. As Fergal Keane (the BBC News Special Correspondent) puts it, 'The relentless tide of bad news from Africa has reinforced cultural stereotypes that date from the colonial era: the African as savage; the African as buffoon; the African as helpless, starving shadow' (Keane,*The Guardian*, 8.6.98:8).

I want to return specifically to ITN's coverage of Rwanda. Trevor McDonald opened one edition of **News At Ten** with these words, "A mass graveyard, the size of a football pitch, is full. Now bodies may have to be burnt". This voyeuristic call meant that, as viewers, we already knew that we would probably have to do very little 'work' to imagine the forthcoming scenario, since the ensuing images would 'do the talking'. McDonald, meanwhile, remained outside of the crisis, a mere relayer of 'facts'. He enunciated the debate on behalf of Africa (the enunciated). Africa meanwhile, was relegated to playing the silent nation, dependent on the West to tell her story.[29]

Scene I

Act One: *Commentary*: 'One man, Irishman Kevin Noon, is fighting a lone and heartbreaking battle to dispose of the diseased corpses.'

Image: Noon walking with dead corpse whose head is positioned closest to camera. Many Rwandans can be seen standing idly around. Noon shouts "Come on...would you get to work. On the bus there are people dead, would you get them off it!"

Act Two: *Commentary*: 'Some of those declared dead, he found still alive'.

Image: Black corpses being loaded off bus with Noon's help. Noon shouts, "Carry this man

over to the hospital, he's not dead, hurry."

Commentary: 'This remarkable man fought back his tears and returned to work'.

Image: Noon carrying dead corpses.

What can be noted here, is that the pictures in the report did not necessarily add to our

understanding of the refugees' plight, but they certainly made us feel that we, as a nation (with

Noon as the symbol of the West), were 'doing something'. As well as being a massive exercise

in voyeurism, the report offered shock-value in the name of news-value. It filtered suffering

through the experience of Western aid workers (and later troops), while explaining nothing

about *why* this catastrophe had come about. The use of sparse commentary implied that

essentially only the pictures could tell the story; the rest we were left to assume was beyond

comprehension and beyond words. Here, pictures were prioritised over context since only

they were presumed to be able to carry the weight of meaning. The overall impression, was

that crisis happens in a place called 'Africa' (a 'mismanaged' continent), and that it takes 'us'

in the West to clean up the mess. As with most 'foreign' news which reaches our screens, the

'story' was also dependent on a Western or European connection (Noon), so that a narrative

link could be constructed on the basis of a relationship between 'us' and 'them'. The

conjunction of image and text produced a meaning which primarily suggested tragedy, chaos

and hopelessness. This is not to suggest that representations of such crises are twisted or

exaggerated, but that - whilst they might indeed raise awareness - it is usually confined to a

superficial level. In fact, the problem of how to 'report Africa' is currently of widespread

concern within the media itself. As Jonathan Dimbleby explains, 'the pressure to be first, to

beat the rivals with even more sensationalist pictures, puts a premium on voyeurism...you

focus on the immediate drama - the dying child, the distraught parents - and, despite yourself, you allow the context to slip away until it is virtually invisible in the background...what is the context in any case? And whose context is it?' (Dimbleby, *The Guardian*, 1.6.98:8-9).

Conclusion

In this conclusion, I want to draw together some of my arguments about the key ways in which news functions both generally and in specific relation to Black representation. Despite the constantly shifting nature of racial identities and the necessarily conflicting and ambiguous elements which they contain and trigger, 'race' is generally understood through certain codes and patterns which are easily 'readable'. As Hall et al have discussed in relation to reports of criminality in Handsworth in 1973, 'public images' became a replacement for any detailed critical analysis of the structural characteristics (which are essential in understanding crime, racism and the environment) of British society. 'Public images' (like stereotypes) function as short-hand devices; "public images' at one and the same time, are graphically compelling, but also stop short of serious, searching analysis; they tend to appear *in place of analysis* - or analysis seems to collapse into the image' (Hall et al, 1978:118). So if we consider those stereotypes/public images which were seen in the coverage of the 1981 riots, these included notions of the ghetto, rioter, victim and deprivation, so that 'the 'transparent' association between crime, race, poverty and housing was condensed into the image of the 'ghetto' but not in any causal formulation' (ibid.). Besides, if we look at the way in which 'ghetto' areas such as Southall are represented, they only come under the news media spotlight in times of trouble, crisis and conflict and so, in turn, come to be seen as innately troubled zones. In addition, their residents are generally packaged as 'victims' of a 'ghetto situation' or as irrationally territorial over their locality and communities (see Chapter 3 on **Underclass in Purdah**). Since news is

so much better at telling us *what* than *why*, news reports usually negate matters of context.

Thus for example, Southall's complex history), has never really been analysed in a critical or

detailed way on television news.[30] The role of 'public images' then, becomes crucial in forming

attitudes towards Southall and British-Asians (since Southall is generally depicted as a

'representative' space for the South Asian diaspora in Britain) in general.

The use of 'public images' and 'thesis journalism', when operating together with the

'newsworthiness' of conflict, dilemma and chaos, have produced a set of narratives in news

production which appear to adequately explain 'the Black experience'. Of course, the

circulation of power and meaning is dependent on both those who are excluded (the

enunciated) and active (the enunciators) in producing images. So, whilst the producers of news

programmes might *select truths*, *set* agendas and *reduce* experiences (thus producing

stereotypes), they often base their work on empirical truths which they choose to - or think

they should - foreground. So, for example, the image of the Black male criminal is not

necessarily fictitious or invented and might in fact, sometimes be based on a certain truth.

Mercer and Julien refer to a 'dominant regime of truth' within which there is a struggle to

understand the nuances and complexities of Black masculinity:

> The prevailing stereotype projects an image of black male youth as "mugger"
> or "rioter"...But this regime of representation is reproduced and maintained in
> hegemony because black men have had to resort to "toughness" as a defensive
> response to the prior aggression and violence that characterizes the way black
> communities are policed (by White male officers). This cycle between reality
> and representation makes the ideological fictions of racism empirically "true"
> - or rather, there is struggle over the definition, understanding and
> construction of meanings around black masculinity within the dominant
> regime of truth. (Mercer and Julien in Mercer, 1994:137-8)

This 'cycle between reality and representation' is an important point to consider. Whilst TV news operates within the dominant regime of truth, and whilst some Black men have indeed adopted violence, often in response to feelings of powerlessness, how that 'truth' is treated in relation to the total context, and to the specific and the general, has an important impact on how we understand Black masculinity. Thus, TV news as an 'official' source of public information, is important for the *way* in which it invites us to understand a particular image or 'story' in relation to 'truth' and context. Although the immediacy of television news locates the occasional Black subjects it captures as instantaneously significant, a consideration of wider contexts and processes related to them (over time) are absent from the daily melange of news output. Context is important though, firstly, because in terms of race and racism, it has all too often been denied; and secondly, because there is an abundance of *mis*information about 'race'. Moreover, news actively operates according to a distinct narrative logic and defines when it is time for narrative closure. So that, for example, during the television news coverage of the elections in South Africa, we were introduced to the key players and developments over a number of weeks, but once the elections were over, we were told virtually nothing about the aftermath and its consequences. And what are we told of the political, social and cultural climate in the Sudan or Ethiopia or Rwanda today? We are not encouraged to invest in the unfolding of events over long periods of time or in the political nuances or consequences of a situation, particularly when the issues are complex and cannot easily be choreographed in a news package.

We have seen that Black subjects are especially significant in the context of television news in moments of crisis - to such an extent that crisis has become the *leitmotif* which has attached

itself to Black subjects in wider contexts and genres. The investment in images of violent crime,

riots and extreme Right groups as news is, of course, largely due to the dramatic structure

through which the news 'story' is presented. News producers often construct their own logic

of conflict (rioter Vs. police, NF/BNP Vs. Anti-Fascists, mugger Vs. victim) and, as such, rest

heavily on dramatisation as their principal mode. There is of course an argument that *all* news

focuses on the negative, the dramatic, the tragic and, as such, it is inevitable that news

depictions of Black people will be adverse. To this degree, any criticisms which can be directed

at news representations of Black people appear to be more linked to the character of the genre

as a hurried, frantic, conveyor-belt type operation, than to specific efforts to depict Black

people negatively. While I would agree that 'negative' Black images are not the product of

collusion or of a general racist conspiracy, and are formed, in part, through the properties of

the genre, due consideration does need to be given to questions of agenda-setting, news values

and news personnel (particularly the type of people in control of news at a strategic, decision-

making level) as well as to the effect of repetitive types of narrative logic and visual

representation. We can therefore understand that news functions not to scheme against Black

people, but operates in accordance with a number of 'structural imperatives' (Hall et al,

1978:60).[31] At the same time, this does not mean that news is inherently resistant to change or

that those who produce it do not need to reevaluate or relocate its ideals. The fact still remains,

that there are far too few Black people represented in 'non-specifically Black' stories and that

Black people are still primarily seen to bring the jaded aspects of their sociological significance

to the genre. There is a further and more current problem, which we can relate to my

discussion in the last chapter on the demise of serious investigative journalism on television.

Up until the end of the 1980s, the lack of context provided by television news might, to some

extent, have been padded out in various current affairs documentaries, but the more

sensationalist, populist-driven emphasis of the documentary genre today, works largely to evade contextualisation and to block out the complexities of such issues.

Given that news is not constructed on the exclusive basis of a Devil's Pact between the broadcasters and racist powers, it needs to be noted that, like all TV genres, news has an audience. The increasingly 'a la carte' nature of news consumption, alongside a shift towards "infotainment" and a more tabloid view of the world, moving 'closer to the American idea of television news, in which most of the items could have run on almost any day' (Lawson, 1993:8), has also contributed to the squeezing out of more thorough, analytic coverage of a given subject. We also need to consider the effects of television news' increasing thirst for drama and styles of presentation, or what Allison Pearson calls "good box-office". Newscaster, Martyn Lewis' plea in 1993 for 'more good news' on television, obliquely pointed to the artificial premise on which most news reports are based, with the suggestion that news *could* be made less gloomy. But the request itself appeared to work against what makes news evocative - hearing/seeing things that don't make us happy and which heighten (and create) our anxieties about the contemporary world, but which will not in any way unsettle our general attitudes *too* much. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, news analysis, 'suits everybody because it confirms what they already know, and, above all, leaves their mental structures intact' (Bourdieu, 1998). In general, the more dramatic, shocking or sensational a story, the more chance it has of being a headline or 'the story of the day'. That's why the 'And finally...' slot in much newscasting is usually the funny, reassuring one. We are also confirmed in the view that, while good news is insipid and manufactured, bad news is 'real'.

With the future promising an astonishing expansion of satellite and cable, digital television (a

prediction of 4,500 channels by the year 2000), and satellite digital signals which Rupert

Murdoch claims can send a newspaper around the world in ten seconds, the character of

television news will inevitably be affected. In respect to our concerns, we need to ask what

this will mean for Britain's Black communities. If these changes do mean the demise of the

'public service' ideal, then who will be speaking for and dealing with issues which relate to

Britain's Black communities? Will the interest in small-scale, unsensational (Black)

'community' issues be squeezed out in the same way as they have been with access slots? To

what degree will extra-terrestrial television channels dominated by global ratings, be likely to

produce programmes which provide comprehensive (global or local) news coverage for

minority groups? Although I have essentially argued against the possibilities of 'balance' in

news programming, perhaps there is an argument that terrestrial TV news is best left as

formulaic and editorially-led, since the ideals on which it is based do still, to some extent, serve

to construct certain liberal parameters around the structure of race reporting. The future could

further erode even these fragile defences.

NOTES

[1] The live nature of the early medium and the continuity and regularity of news reports since then, also means that access to specific news archive footage over time is near impossible.

[2] According to the ITC Research findings on Ethnic Minorities' Views, television (over press, radio etc.) is the main source of world news with 72% of the Main Sample (71% Asians and 74% African Caribbeans) using the medium for this purpose. TV is also the second greatest source of local news (newspapers being the first). 91% of the main sample have an interest in national news television programmes. (The ITC's *Television: Ethnic Minorities' Views*,was published in March 1996 as an addition to the annual survey of public attitudes to television, *Television:The Public's View*, 1994).

[3] The 1994 ITC survey asked its 1,000 person sample ('representative of both national and regional populations') to what degree it perceived impartiality of news and current affairs programmes on the four main broadcast TV channels towards different groups in society (1994, Table 6.4, p.49). 71% felt that news and current affairs programmes were fair towards ethnic minorities; 13% felt that they were biased in favour of ethnic minorities and 12% that they were biased against ethnic minorities. In fact, the sample believed that television was more biased against the police force than against ethnic minorities in news and current affairs programming. The survey concludes that television is seen as the most complete, accurate, prompt (in delivering news) and clear (in explaining events and issues) source of news information.

[4] Darnton (1975) relates the reporting of news to ancient traditions of story-telling, with characters, drama, plots, sequences. heroes/villains etc. See R Darnton (1975) 'Writing News and Telling Stories' Daedalus, Spring,175-94.

[5] For moreon primary and secondary definers, see Hall's 'The Social Production of News' in Hall et al, 1978, 53-77.

[6] See also Hall (1996) 'When was 'The Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit' in Chambers and Curti, 1996, 244, and Gillespie 'Coming of age in Southall: TV news talk' in Gillespie, 1995, 131-141 for more on representations of the Gulf War.

[7] Appointed by the Home Secretary, the CRE is a a pivotal institution in the quest to ensure that ethnic minorities are not discriminated against. It is a non-political body which offers free legal aid, investigates allegations of discriminatory practice and implements and monitors equal opportunity programmes. Since 1992, the CRE has held the annual Race in The Media Awards (RIMA) which, according to its publicity material, are designed to 'encourage more informed coverage of race relations issues'. The Awards are held annually and there are seven categories. These are national newspaper; regional and local newspaper; specialist journal/magazine; radio drama; radio current affairs/documentary; TV drama and TV current affairs/documentary. There is also a special Youth Award. The publicity says that "The winners will be those, who in the opinion of the distinguished panel of judges, have made a significant contribution to public appreciation and understanding of race relations in the United Kingdom."

[8] Although I am mainly focusing on news representations of the NF during the 1970s, it is worth noting that the NF and BNP have also been a constant subject on documentary programmes e.g. **Public Eye: Right Fighters** (BBC2, Tx:22.1.93).

[9] An interesting example of how the press exercised its right to be partial was seen in February, 1997. The *Daily Mail's* front page made the unprecedented move of naming the five men which they claimed murdered Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in 1993 and challenged them to sue if they were innocent ('Murderers', *Daily Mail*, 14.2.97). The story raised a number of issues about the media, race and the law but only Channel 4's news made the decision to focus on the story in some detail (Tx:14.2.97). The *Daily Mail*, despite its usually jaded depictions of Black stories, was alone in its bold confrontation of the Lawrence case. *The Guardian* also compared how little media exposure Doreen Lawrence's son's death had received compared to the murder of White headmaster Phillip Lawrence *(The Guardian*, January 1997). **Windrush** made the important point however, that public attitudes towards Stephen Lawrence's death have contrasted greatly with the widespred indifference to the thirteen young Black people who died in Deptford in 1981.

[10] This style of presentation was also apparent in the coverage of the National Front's public opposition campaigns against Czech asylum seekers in Britain in 1997 and 1998.

[11] Some however, have pointed out that it is only in this type of programming (magazine/current affairs) that Black people are given the space to operate, and that aesthetically **Black Britain's** format is outdated and bland (Isaac Julien 'Cultural Partnerships' talk on 31.7.96).

[12] George Alagiah (the BBC's Africa Correspondent) and Martin Bashir received awards for Media Professional/Personality of the Year and Best Visual Journalist respectively at the 1998 Ethnic Minority Media Awards.

[13] The Aston findings also found that there were '12 regular presenters who accounted for 10% of the actual ethnic minority population and that this was made up of 12 appearances by Trevor McDonald who accounted for 3% of all ethnic minority appearances on factual programming and Shefali Oza whose 15 appearances accounted for 8% of all the appearances of Asian minority groups on factual television' (Cumberbatch and Woods, 1996:11).

[14] Young British Blacks are often categorised as 'Youth'. Youth refers to young men (aged 16 and over). By contrast, the dependency myth propagated in relation to countries such as Africa is augmented through a focus on 'children'.

[15] This image was evident on British television as early as 1959 in an American documentary film called **The Quiet One** (Dir: Sydney Myers, BBC, Tx:17.5.59). It was described as, 'The moving story of a struggle to gain the confidence and the cooperation of a young Negro boy whose broken home has made him a potential delinquent' (Quote taken from BFI Archive notes). During this time, British television also screened many programmes which located Africa in a primitive context, such as **Prehistoric Man In Africa** (Tx:29.9.50).

[16] It is very rarely that we see considered coverage of White racist violent attacks. On one edition of **This Morning** (ITV, Tx:31.3.98), Mal Hussein, a victim of 7 years of racist attacks on his property and family (including petrol bombs and shootings) described how his attackers referred to him as "Black bastard" and "fucking Paki". Hussein (who was invited to speak about 'bad neighbours' along with a White woman who's neighbours played loud music) was advised that he should just move, was hurried

to describe the racist attacks and Richard Madeley went on to apologise for Hussein's use of bad language.

[17] Although I am looking exclusively at new representations of the 1980s riots, there were a number of documentaries which dealt with the events. These include, **TV Eye: 'Race Riots: The Lessons of St.Pauls'** (ITV, Tx:10.4.80), **Panorama: The Lessons of Brixton** (BBC1, Tx:13.4.81), **Skin: Southall Riots** (ITV,Tx:5.7.81)

[18] For a detailed discussion of 'crime news' see Hall et al, 1978.

[19] See Tumber, 1982, for a more detailed outline of the chronology of the events of Summer, 1981, the television coverage of them and the debates around the 'effects' of the coverage.

[20] Recent reports on South Asian crime have overlooked the fact that since Operation Shampoo was set up in the 1980s to operate against organised groups such as Holy Smokes and Tooti Nungs: 1) there has been increased police surveillance and presence in 'Asian areas' such as Tower Hamlets; 2) the number of Asians in prison is approximately in proportion to their overall population; 3) there is a larger percentage of young (0-15) Pakistanis and Bangladeshis within their ethnic group than amongst say, Indians or the English; and 4) the Home Office statistics which show that longer prison sentences are generally awarded to Black and Asian defendants.

[21] In his essay ,'Capital, 'black youth' and crime' (in Sivanandan, 1983) Gutzmore argues that the news media and the press in particular, played a critical role in the social construction of the connection between 'Black youth' and 'mugging' to such an extent that statistics were orchestrated to back up myth.

[22] Paul Condon's statements about the predominance of muggers within the Black community which prompted Operation Eagle Eye were largely based on the figure of 40,000 victims being harassed by 80% Black muggers between the ages of 14 and 16. (**London Tonight** Tx:3.8.95 (Carlton regional news programme)).

[23] A report on **London South East** (BBC1, Tx:20.7.96) focused on Black muggers being seized by police.

[24] See Henrietta Lidchi's OU Ph.D. on images of foreign dependency and modes of aid advertising and also her chapter 'The poetics and politics of exhibiting other cultures' in Hall, 1997:151-222.

[25] An important intervention to the 'Our man in...[foreign country]' foreign news report, was Channel 4's documentary series **South** which commissioned programme-makers in the South to make programmes about their specific regions and countries from a local perspective.

[26] The Los Angeles riots followed the clearance of four White LA policemen of assaulting a Black motorist, Rodney King. ITN's coverage of the riots ran from 29.4.92-3.5.92.

[27] A documentary about the sex drives of men and women, **The Sex Scientists: Women - The Inside Story** (Tx:5.8.96, Channel 4), although it focused throughout on the West, turned suddenly in its closing sequences, to voyeuristic close-ups of female circumcision in Africa and genital mutilation in 'Islamic countries'. This had no bearing on the rest of the programme's narrative but produced some of the most indelible images in the programme and one that was frequently mentioned in reviews.

[28] Ellis (1982), Lewis (1991) and Livingstone & Lunt (1994) have all pointed to the central role of dialogue in representation, particularly in the TV news genre.

[29] This has not only been confined to news, but has been the dominant bias across various television genres and in programmes from different countries. In **Neighbours** (Tx:18.7.96) for example, there was a prominent storyline in which Carol Kennedy and Brett Stark travelled around Africa to see how 'World Vision' money was spent to help otherwise impoverished Africans. Africa was filtered through the White characters perceptions and was depicted as impoverished but also as exotic. (No doubt the storyline was also used to justify criticisms of the lack of sustained Black characters in Ramsay Street.) Similarly in **Home & Away** (Tx:9.8.96), Travis Nash experienced nightmares over his stay in Somalia. Taking a 15 year old Somalian girl, Stephanie, into his home, he said that this was a better option than going "back to England to become a ward of state, or worse still - to Somalia" . In 1993, the Australian producer, Bruce Gyngell, refuted suggestions that **Home and Away** and **Neighbours** were popular in Britain because they were virtually all-White soaps (see The Guardian, 2.11.93).

[30] Notable incidents in Southall's history have included the murder of an 18-year old Sikh boy, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, opposite Southall's Dominion Cinema on 4 June 1976; the establishment of the Southall Youth Movement the day after Chaggar's murder; the events leading up to and effects of the death of teacher, Blair Peach, during the 1979 disturbances; and the burning of a Southall pub

(Hamborough Tavern) in protest of the skinhead band (Oi) who had performed there and its NF supporters (3 July, 1981).

[31] For a discussion of how 'the media stand in a position of structured subordination to the primary definers' see Hall et al, 1978, 59.

PART II

FICTION AND ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMES

Chapter Five

'The Black Situation' in British Television Comedy

The first role blacks were permitted to perform in white society, after that of

slave or servant, was that of entertainer. (Pieterse, 1992:136)

So far, we have been looking at representations of the 'real world' and real problems in the

public domain. We now enter the second stage of the thesis, which shifts the emphasis

towards fiction, discourses of pleasure and 'lighter' forms of entertainment. Of course, the two

are not neatly extricable from each other (as we saw in the pleasure-oriented documentary

mode). In fact, British television comedy - the focus of this chapter - has often alluded to the

'real'. Despite the seeming innocence of the comic mode, it does not always operate outside

the politics of racism but, in fact, routinely depends on it for its narrative and temporal setting.

Indeed, the construction of the Black social problem myth on television (which I have been

concentrating on so far), has not been exclusive to actuality programming and has, in fact,

recurrently been used as a motivation and excuse for racist humour on the proverbial grounds

of 'laughter being the best medicine' (to get rid of forms of 'social tension' such as racism).

Because of the apparent 'lightness' of the comic mode, its political and ideological side has

often been overlooked. But, as Andy Medhurst argues, comedy is 'supremely ideological'. The

analysis of comedy, however, threatens to deconstruct and subsequently destroy what once

made people laugh; 'to render the once funny unfunny' (Medhurst in Daniels & Gerson,

1989:15).

Comedy, unlike drama, rarely deals with the past, but tends to home in on current

preoccupations in present climates. In this sense, the history of 'race sitcoms' and black comedy can usefully be treated as some kind of barometer of popular opinion on race over time. Since jokes are always born out of particularities, comedy reveals who and what different cultures find funny in that moment. This chapter, as well as looking specifically at how Black people have been depicted in comedy, will open up more general debates about intention, impact, authorship and context. As I will go on to argue, these issues are especially pertinent here, since obtaining pleasure is highly dependent on the 'extra-artistic' terrain - and 'pleasures' are highly subjective. The 1960s/1970s sitcom **Till Death Us Do Part**, is the classic model which incorporates these knotty issues, but there are many other illustrations of how ambiguity is contained within, and assorted readings can be derived from, the same comedy text. Central to this discussion, is whether images of Blackness in television comedy 'play on' or 'play(s) off the well-entrenched black clown stereotype' (Hall in Givanni, 1995:21) and whether we are being invited to laugh *with* or *at* the Black comic entertainer.

Pieterse's account of the roles Black people have been licensed to play in Western culture notes the centrality of Blacks as entertainers (clowns, jesters, singers and dancers). The entertainer model has also been identified by Stuart Hall as one of three standard images of televisual Blackness (Hall, 1981). For some, the image of the raced clown is deeply ambivalent and sometimes has quite sinister connotations. Carlin has argued how the role of the clown functions as a 'lighter' version of racist imagery. He says:

> Racial clowning is the classic defence against humiliation and physical
> attack...the Irish clown, who is always drunk; there is the Asian clown, the
> Babu; there is the Negro clown - we know him well...All racial clowns are
> sooner or later celebrated on the musical comedy stage. (Carlin, 'Clowns for
> all Races', *New Society*, 9.1.75)

The comedy figure captures, according to Hall, 'the 'innate humour, as well as the physical grace of the licensed entertainer - putting on a show for The Others. It is never quite clear whether we are laughing with or at this figure: admiring the physical and rhythmic grace, the open expressivity and emotionality of the 'entertainer', or put off by the 'clown's stupidity' (Hall, 1981:40). Many critics have commented on the relative success of images of Blackness in comedy compared to other performance genres such as drama (Young and Hall in Givanni, 1995). Indeed, Black people have, over time, occupied an increasingly prominent role in the comedy zone and shifted in the main, from being referred to as the source of humour to being comic players 'in their own right'. Comedy has, as such, widely been used as a measure of success in the context of Black representation. The changing bias of television in recent years, has also marked a shift towards entertainment (over information) as the leading televisual mode. Controller of BBC1, Jonathan Powell, says:

> As television diversified, as it became more competitive, as the BBC became
>
> an entertainment entity and had to fight for its position, I knew that one of
>
> the most important and expanding areas of television was going to be
>
> comedy. (Powell at 'Black and White in Colour' Conference, 1992, quoted
>
> in Givanni, 1995:44)

Section 1: The Comedy Genre and Early Figures of Fun

a) Setting Up the Debates

According to Raymond Williams, comedy is an 'effectively new form' which has its derivatives in the television medium' (Williams, 1974:76-7). Others have argued in favour of a less evolutionary comedy tradition, with the television form bringing new variations to an already popular comic mode - borrowing not only from vaudeville and variety-sketch routines,

but also from radio comedy and the British comedy films of the 1950s (Eaton in Bennett et al, 1981:28). The British television sitcom first emerged in the 1950s, but the 1970s is widely argued to be its Golden Age (as supported by retrospectives such as Channel 4's **Sitcom Weekend**, Tx:24.5.97-26.5.97). For the purpose of this discussion, it is worth mentioning two aspects of the early British television comedy tradition. The first, is the genre's dependence on American comedy both as imports (**I Love Lucy** (ITV, 1955-),**The Phil Silvers Show** (BBCTV, 1957-)) and as models to clone. The second, is the centrality of the satirical mode (first brought to screen with **That Was The Week That Was** (BBCTV, 1962-3) and so-called 'new wave' domestic comedies such as **Steptoe and Son** (BBCTV, 1962-65, 1970, 1972, 1974), **Till Death** and **Sykes** (BBCTV, 1960-65, 1971-9). The British television comedy tradition has, since its beginnings, relied heavily on 'the situation' and on the effects of repetition and familiarity. The situation - of the situation comedy - needs to contain 'flow and regularity', which Heath and Skirrow have characterised as a central feature of television, and which also calls for a degree of familiarity between text and audience (Heath & Skirrow, 1977). In turn, this recognisability calls for a certain amount of rote and predictability in the setting. Thus, 'nothing that has happened in the narrative in the previous week must destroy or even complicate the way the situation is grounded' (Eaton in Bennett et al, 1981:33). The notion of confinement is also central to comedy, where characters are often forced to deal with situations and interact with others in a usually trapped situation.

The distinction between 'television' and 'society' has commonly been made in the context of 'light entertainment', where the invitation to find pleasure is sold on the grounds that it acts as the direct antithesis of the routine displeasure to be found in everyday (home and work) life. Light entertainment is assumed to allow us to release all those stored up happy endorphines,

to act as a relief mechanism which serves as harmless catharsis. Interestingly, the 1978 IBA

Handbook, in its section on sitcoms, stated that, 'After the tensions and anxieties of everyday

life, people welcome the opportunity to sit down, relax, and be made to smile and laugh'

(1978:89). It is with this assumption in mind that the actual rampant drive towards addressing

'heavy' social issues in television comedy needs to be considered, and more specifically, why

the axis of such a large proportion of British sitcom laughs have rested on notions of racial

difference. This inclination to address 'heavy' issues in 'light entertainment', has often been

defended by the creators of comedy on the grounds that the genre is being used as a form of

social commentary. It is often argued that satire is central to the workings of a healthy

democracy - a kind of miracle cure that restores social order. Thus, comedy writers, in

frequently pledging their commitment to liberal ideals, shield themselves and their comic

creations by using irony, or by creating structures of 'reverse racism' to work against

accusations of being anti-Black. If we can agree that much sitcom is at the heart of dialogue

about contemporary society, we must also acknowledge that it is here that the most

fundamental misconception about 'TV' and 'society' exists; to assume that television simply

reflects what is going on 'out there', overlooks the fact that representation does not merely

reflect, but is an active part of society. Thus, we need to consider comic representations of

race and Black Britain, not simply as reactions to an external reality, but as active shapers in

how race relations comes to be seen.

Alongside these 'relief mechanism' and 'social order' arguments, we also need to ask what it is

about the British comedy tradition which has deemed it an apt place to register difference?

What in these instances, is being asked of the viewer; *who* is being laughed at and *why*? Since

comedy exists within the context of society, must we recognise 'where the people being

stereotyped as subjects of jokes do not have power and are being actively oppressed by application of those negative and derogatory stereotypes' (Twitchin, 1988:204). Are we to believe Howard Jacobson's claim that "to jettison offence is to jettison the joke" and if so are we to see this as the taunt of the bully or the fact of comedy? (Jacobson, cited from **Seriously Funny**, Channel 4 Tx:4.2.97).

b) Early Objects of Fun

Early Black figures of fun were not confined to a comedy genre as such, as this was yet to establish itself fully on television. The presence of Black light entertainers goes back to 1936 when Buck and Bubbles, a Black American song and dance team appeared on the opening day of the BBC television service at Alexandra Palace (BBCTV, Tx:2.11.36). They were described in the *Radio Times* as, 'a coloured pair who are versatile comedians, who dance, play the piano, sing and cross-chat' (see Chapter 6). Many such variety acts occupied this ambiguous form of showmanship, displaying genuine talent (usually musical) on the one hand, while being cartoonish objects of fun on the other. Caricatures of Blacks as the butt of the joke continued (although not without some criticism) into the 1950s, with the popular US television show **Amos 'n' Andy** (CBS, 1951-53) in which Andy Brown and Amos Jones (Spencer Williams and Alvin Childress) played two idle and clumsy Black fools[1] (see Chapter 6 on the minstrelsy tradition).

Prior to the 1970s, there were very few representations of Black people in British television comedies. Black people were occasionally referred to but, given the general cautious approach to 'race relations' up to the latter part of the 1960s, it was hardly surprising that this was not a standard source of public humour. Black-British actor/comedian Kenny Lynch, was one of

British television's first light entertainment stars and, during the 1950s and 1960s, made a

number of television appearances. But Lynch's 'Blackness' (especially when he worked

alongside Jimmy Tarbuck in a number of light entertainment shows during the 1960s and

1970s) was still*the* basic element of the comic routine. Lynch appeared in **Till Death** in 1967,

and **Curry and Chips** in 1969. But it is worth noting that Lynch accepted comedy on the

basis of the joke, not of the target. He says:

> There are jokes about everybody - the Irish , Poles, English, Germans, Jews -
>
> so we've got to have our turn as well. And I don't find them offensive as
>
> racial jokes. If they're funny, they're funny...If you've got twelve people and
>
> one black guy, then the black guy is obviously going to get the brunt of the
>
> jokes...All jokes, whatever they're about, are offensive if they're not funny.
>
> (Quoted in Pines, 1992:112)

Lynch's view seems a bit muddled when he goes on to suggest that what those who criticise

the fact that he volunteered himself as a target of racist humour 'don't realise is that we didn't

have a lot of option then but to tell those kind of jokes' (quoted in Pines, 1992:113). If one

takes a look through the archives at some of Lynch's early appearances, then it is clear that the

question of race, racism and comedy is more complex than Lynch's 'just good fun' argument.

Here, I refer specifically to **Curry and Chips** (LWT, 1969) a set of six half hour, situation

comedies. This starred Eric Sykes as the 'well-meaning' factory foreman (Arthur Blenkinsop),

with Kenny Lynch as his young worker (Kenny) and Spike Milligan as a blacked-up Irish

Pakistani (Kevin O'Grady). O'Grady, complete with nodding head and mock pidgin accent

(which presumably denoted an Irish-Asian), represented the bumbling, non-Western character-

type which was to be recycled again and again in other TV comedies such as **It Ain't Half**

Hot, Mum (BBC, 1974-81), and in various dramas and adverts. The opening credits of **Curry**

and Chips was notable for its scenes of a multi-racial Britain - this was accompanied by out-of tune bawls of 'Pakistani...Pappadom', which roughly set the grounds of humour for the next half hour.

In the first episode of **Curry and Chips** (Tx:13.1.69), O'Grady appeared as a character looking for work at the factory - much to employee Norman's (played by Norman Rossington) disgust at the prospect of having another Black colleague. Threatening to strike, Norman pointed to Kenny saying, "We've got our coloured worker" and then, "When it comes to Blacks, I'm with Enoch...If they sent all the wogs back home, we'd have an extra hour of daylight". Norman muttered on about 'coons, sambos, rednecks' and about 'wogs' burning their wives, eating each other and nicking White men's jobs. Kenny, as the comedy's only 'real' Black character (i.e. not 'blacked-up), was equally vehement in his anti-'wog' stance. To add to this anti-Asian bandwagon, even (the blacked-up) O'Grady explained that he had left Pakistan because there were too many wogs there - only to find that there were too many in Britain! The Arthur character was supposed to operate as the sole voice of liberalism, reasoning "They're civilised now. They've been brought up the same as us". The relative 'acceptability' of Kenny amongst his colleagues was, one senses, designed to show British tolerance 'within reason' (i.e. Kenny was born in Britain, and this was constantly referred to). In this sense, the programme adopted the 'divide and rule' ethos between those 'Made in Britain' and 'real foreigners', and furthermore, exploited the difference between Asians and African-Caribbeans. There was something surreal about seeing a White comedian blacked-up as a Pakistani (Milligan), who was, in turn, being mocked for his foreignness by a genuinely Black actor (Lynch). Screened at a time when Black immigration was high on the political agenda, **Curry and Chips** was firmly stuck in the topical Powellite rhetoric of anti-immigration.

c) CASE STUDY 1: Till Death Us Do Part - (Anti) Racist?

Within the context of the satire boom of the 1960s, **Till Death Us Do Part** (BBC1, 1966-68,

1972, 1974-5) represented a more sophisticated and abstract approach towards representing

British attitudes towards Black people.[2] Its satirical approach was in fact, its central strain.

Till Death broke away from the British comedy tradition of innuendo by being very upfront

in the way the (racist) jokes were delivered. The Alf creation was of a flawed, bigoted and

reactionary character who lived in an East End house with his wife Elsie (Dandy Nicholls),

daughter Rita (Una Stubbs) and boyfriend (and later Son-in-law) Mike (Anthony Booth). Rita

represented the voice of reason, and Mike was the symbol of liberal youth designed to

provoke Alf (Warren Mitchell).[3] Alf's creator, Johnny Speight explained, "I wanted to create

this character that was pig-ignorant and of course the nation fell in love with him" (**The Life &**

Times of Alf Garnett, BBC2, Tx:5.1.97). Indeed, the interesting thing about **Till Death**,

which was widely understood as stridently racist, or anti-racist, or something in-between -

depending on your point of view - was what it revealed about: 1) the different ways in which

racisms and, for that matter, anti-racisms can work; 2) the potential gap between (liberal)

intention and impact; and 3) the fact that a representation can produce and circulate a number

of different (and often competing) ideologies and meanings.

The pilot programme of **Till Death** (for the BBC Comedy Playhouse (Tx:22.7.65)), made a

huge impact and was immediately commissioned as a series of six for June 1966. The early

series was quickly at the top of the ratings and reached approximately 12 million viewers

(about half the homes in Britain). Despite (and indeed because of) the fact that the series was

so popular during the 1960s, it provoked criticism on many fronts, but mainly for bringing

subjects such as sex, politics and religion into the realm of light entertainment and into

people's homes, and for discussing them in blatant and (according to Mary Whitehouse who

subsequently launched a Clean-Up TV campaign) crude terms. Of course by then, it was clear

to many at the BBC (such as Hugh Carelton Greene), that the more outrageous the show, the

more viewers it would get. Indeed, Alf went on to supersede fictional status and became a

cultural phenomenon, attracting seismic media coverage.[4]

The show was outrageous in terms of race because up until the mid to late-1960s, Black

people were more notable for their absence from television or as a public topic of conversation.

The difference of **Till Death**, was that Alf was made to say the unspeakable at a time when

the rest of television was generally approaching the question of race with an air of liberal

caution (and it is for his views on race that the series is best remembered). Alf, with no holds

barred, made his racist (and homophobic and sexist) views known, and the force and passion

with which they were delivered by Mitchell overpowered the rest of the characters in the

comedy. If Enoch Powell had a lot to do with opening up the debate about 'race' and

immigration in the political and legislative arena at this time, then Alf Garnett did the same for

light entertainment. The myth of the Black problematic, as was being propagated in a lot of

actuality programming by the late-1960s, made Alf's views, for many, appear logical (if

extreme) expressions of race, giving them what Barry has called 'a real legitimacy' (Barry in

Twitchin, 1988).

It is of course ironic, that **Till Death** featured no regular Black character. It therefore attracted

some criticism for being racist by referring to Black people in a derogatory way when they had

no significant right of reply in the programme or on British television at large. Guyanese actor,

Thomas Baptiste, made an appearance in the second episode of the first series, but even at that early stage felt uncomfortable about how Alf's racism might be interpreted by the viewing public. He expressed his concern to producer, Dennis Main Wilson, and recounts, 'although I thought the script was very funny, I felt people were going to be laughing with this bigoted man, instead of at him...those jobs always represented a dichotomy for one as a professional actor - either one did them, or one refused, in which case somebody else would have done them" (quoted in Pines, 1992:67). Alf meanwhile, emulated some of Powell's 'real-life' panic and, in this sense, added to a newly emerging wave of popular opinion on race and immigration. For some, Alf certainly validated their racist views and was held as a figure not to be loathed, but to be loved. He was, in fact, a peculiarly sympathetic character, thus winning audience identification, which was the real source of Alf's and indeed the programme's ambivalence.

The point here is not so much whether **Till Death** can be determined as a racist text or not, because to that there is no clear-cut answer, but that it was precisely Alf's bigotry which Speight claimed he was working against. He argued:

> I never created Alf Garnett, society created him. He's a lout; a loutish,
> ignorant, raucous peabrain. A society that is frightened to see an Alf Garnett
> reflecting some of the worst elements of that society is a society that's in
> deep trouble...Politically correct people sweep things under the carpet, they
> live in a fictional world where we should all love our neighbours...I don't
> think politically correct people can see the joke. You can't play a racist
> without using racist language...In comedy you can't not offend people.
> (Speight, cited from **Without Walls**, Channel 4, Tx:25.10.94)

Speight might have been right in his analysis of how humour functions as a reactionary process

and of how different members of society interpreted Alf according to their own values, but if

we are to assume that 'PC people' didn't get that the joke was on Alf, then we also have to

say that a lot of 'politically incorrect' people didn't understand how satire works. We also

cannot escape the fact that it was the point of identification which clinched support for Alf -

nothing else in the text could destroy the pro-Alf identification. If you identify with a

character on aesthetic or dramatic grounds, then you will, whether you like it or not, identify

with what they stand for, despite your own reservations. Warren Mitchell was routinely told

by members of the public that they loved it when he 'had a go at the coons'. Speight received

congratulations *and* criticism for his treatment of Black people, by both Black and White

viewers. Thus, what **Till Death** demonstrated, was that a single text can produce

contradictory meanings and readings and can, as such, say more than one thing.

The diverse readings of Speight's message highlighted how meaning is not simply enclosed

within the text itself, but is actively produced outside it by the way it is read by an audience

and the context in which it is received and transmitted. Ambiguity is further contained within

us, as individual readers, so that programmes can appeal to mixed sensibilities at the same

time.[5] In fact, Speight's liberal intentions were not really the defining factor, since audiences -

as well as being hugely unpredictable - are not driven by the will of good intentions or

preferred meanings alone.[6] Speight's objectives were no guarantee of anything because he

neither controlled audience identifications completely, nor had any hold on continuing forms of

racism through which many interpreted the programme. In essence, **Till Death** was not *just*

Speight's text. Speight could not guarantee, and therefore cannot be held as solely responsible

for whether Alf became a victim or hero of his own comedy, but he did appear to make the

too-simple assumption that all members of the television audience were 'ahead' of the

characters. It could also be said that the text did lay itself open to extreme and disparate

readings because of the space it left for them. Can racist jokes and rhetoric really be expected

to produce anti-racist readings? Given the fact that anti-Black sentiment was increasingly being

mobilised publicly at this time, was this an appropriate moment in which to air such racist

views? What exactly was it that was making the show so popular? Could *all* of the 12 million

who regularly tuned in, be expected to be politically opposed to Alf? To what extent was the

audience able to 'dis-identify' with such a sympathetic character? The ambiguity of **Till Death**

proved to be workable on many levels and on two sides - both within the text and in terms of

the readings it produced.

Section 2: The Comedies 'About Race' in the 1970s

At first it seems surprising that a genre dependent on laughter and 'light' entertainment, was so

quick to embrace the 'serious' matter of race within its comic narratives.[7] The 1970s saw a big

investment in comedies about race. As outlined in the CARM programme, **It Ain't Half**

Racist, Mum, and later by Stuart Hall, these,

> comedies do not simply include blacks: they are *about race*. That is, the
>
> same old categories of racially-defined characteristics and qualities, and the
>
> same relations of superior and inferior, provide the pivots on which the jokes
>
> actually turn, the tension-points which move and motivate the situations in
>
> situation comedies. The comic register in which they are set, however,
>
> protects and defends viewers from acknowledging their incipient racism. It
>
> creates disavowal. (Hall, 1981:43)

Within the wider context of multiculturalism, the race sitcoms' of the 1970s aimed to represent

the supposed cultural characteristics of different ethnic communities, and comically depict

how they 'coped' within usually confined British settings. But essentially these comedies 'about race', were actually about 'Blackness' and thus, it was assumed, about 'non-Britishness'. Black skin was always made to signify 'something', and that something was usually about *trouble*; *trouble* with the neighbours, *trouble* with language, *trouble* with 'fitting in'. As such, these comic narratives were almost universally structured around Black people being on the margins of or misplaced in Britain. Even if White characters did display prejudice, this was deemed funny or understandable given the 'difficulty' of 'the situation'. Interestingly, a number of the producers of the 1970s race sitcoms alleged that they were addressing questions of race and racism and trying comically to depict how racial discrimination did exist. The 'comedy as a social service' argument was also routinely put forward, with the claim that a Black presence on-screen would familiarise and naturalise them to a White majority viewing public.

Although this might possibly have been one effect, the way in which these comedy programmes chose to mark racial difference needs to be noted. In addition, attempts at addressing 'social issues' were often made at the price of losing the comedy. Carmen Munroe, who began her comedy career in the first Black family sitcom, **The Fosters** (LWT/ITV, 1976-7) (see Chapter 8 for an outline of Munroe's drama career), agrees that this was one of the problems with **Mixed Blessings** (LWT/ITV, 1978-80), a 'race sitcom' which was based around the problems posed by a mixed marriage in which she also appeared (see Pines, 1992:63).[8] One exception which included a major Black character but which stood apart from these comedies 'about race', was **Rising Damp** (Yorkshire TV/ITV, 1974-78). The series did not profess to be the product of a grand multicultural philosophy, and 'Blackness' was not *the* defining element in the comedy. Philip Smith (Don Warrington) played an intelligent, well-

educated, if smug, son of an African tribal chief alongside Rupert Rigsby (Leonard Rossiter), the irrepressible, snooping landlord. In general though, a stereotyped version of Blackness was usually presented in the comedies 'about race', while the only alternative appeared to be an absence of representation altogether. But the standard defence that some representation was better than none, that putting something on screen would necessarily 'unshackle' it, tended to overlook the quality of those same images.

One such series was **Mind Your Language** (LWT/ITV, 1977-79). Although stuck in the assimilationist rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s, this series was the most obvious attempt to represent a multicultural Britain. Never before had so many diverse races (Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Turks, Greeks, Japanese, etc.), been seen in the same television frame. They had also never clung so tightly to their popular national stereotypes. Conveniently set in an English-language class, **Mind Your Language** (which starred, amongst others, Jamila Massey, Albert Moses and Dino Shafeek), set up the perfect opportunity to show the differences between various 'foreigners'. Ranjit, for example, was the classic 'nice but dim' Indian stereotype, with constant insinuations made about how he scrounged off the state. Similar glib and racist associations were made with each of the ethnic types. Audiences were invited to laugh at Ranjit and his classmates, not only because of their racial difference, but more specifically because of their non-Englishness (denoted in their accents, customs and clothes). The only racially 'neutral' character (i.e. with no 'obvious' racial characteristics) was the English teacher, Jeremy Brown (Barry Evans). At the time, the programme was defended by Humphrey Barclay (then Head of Comedy at London Weekend Television which produced many of these comedies), on the grounds that seeing different races on-screen, would make them less alien. In 1985, Michael Grade (then at LWT), on being questioned by Linda Agran at the Edinburgh

Television Festival, agreed that **Mind Your Language** was racist and said, "It was really

irresponsible of us to put it out".

Another popular show at this time, was **New Faces** (ATV/ITV, 1973-8), a talent show which

'discovered' major British comedic personalities such as Gary Wilmot, Jim Davidson and

Lenny Henry. Another programme, **The Comedians** (Granada TV/ITV, 1971-85), featured

stand-up comics from the working-mens' club circuit such as Bernard Manning and Black

comedian Charlie Williams (who, in his thick Yorkshire accent would joke, "Watch out, or I'll

come and live next door to you").[9] Most of the comics on **The Comedians** worked within a

specific tradition which was male, working-class, sexist and racist. At the same time, even

when Black comedians did tell racist jokes, this was sometimes considered as a breakthrough,

'because they [the Black comedian] wanted the audience to know that they knew' (Henry in

Phillips and Phillips, 1998:314; my addition). Meanwhile, some Black dramatic actors were

being snapped up for comedy parts when little else was happening for them outside of theatre

(see Chapter 6). Despite the critical and popular acclaim which many of these Black actors

received, the comic roles they were being cast in, were still usually dependent on marking

'Blackness' in stereotypical ways. Trinidadian actor, Rudolph Walker, received a share (along

with his co-stars Nina Baden-Semper who played his wife Barbie, and Kate Williams and Jack

Smethurst) of a Variety Club Award as ITV Personality of the Year (1972) for his role as Bill

Reynolds in **Love Thy Neighbour** (Thames TV/ITV, 1972-6). Spotted by producer Stuart

Allen, Walker agreed to do the part on the condition that, 'my character wasn't turned into an

Uncle Tom...They assured me that he certainly wouldn't be. So it was agreed that if the

bigoted White neighbour called me something I would call him the equivalent back. If he hit me,

I would hit him back. In other words, we were to be on a par' (quoted in Pines, 1992:78).

Walker (later to be seen in the BBC sitcom **The Thin Blue Line** as PC Gladstone), has fond

memories of the series and saw it both as good entertainment and unique in its depictions of

Blacks answering back to abuse. The fact that Black people were seen doing 'normal' things

within a British domestic setting did indeed make a change, but as Barry argues 'the

programme had a core of liberal idealism that said that the presence of black people could be

justified only if they addressed the problem of prejudice and that prejudice was essentially an

individual thing which could be eased away with laughter' (Barry in Twitchin, 1988:93-94).

Despite the attempt at 'tackling' racist attitudes through comedy, the 'Blackness' of the

Reynolds was constantly and stereotypically sign-posted. Bill was seen limbo-dancing in the

pub in one episode and voodoo/Black magic was the theme of another - as if these were what

being Black was about. **Love Thy Neighbour** also continued the gendered pattern of television

representations of prejudice where the wives were the long-suffering, tolerant ones, while their

husbands blatantly espoused their racist values.

Once again, the disparity between programme aim and latent effect were in evidence. The 1975

ITV Handbook boasted of the success of **Love Thy Neighbour** and a Thames Television

spokesman insisted that it served the dual function of being both good comedy and of

encouraging good race relations; 'by using humour it takes the heat out of the colour question'

(quoted in Twitchin, 1988:124).[10] Of course, laughter does not necessarily mean that we have

'overcome' racism, but that we can, in fact, be in the midst of reproducing racist ideologies. Like

other comedies about race, **Love Thy Neighbour** set up a deliberately racist situation, only to

deflate it (thus often 'exposing' the White characters prejudice). But this did not make the

humour any less dependent on supremacist assumptions and racist language. Bill Reynolds, for

example, might have come out of a comic situation looking wiser and less ignorant than his

White neighbour, but he would still have to be called "nig-nog" twenty times before that! In any case, racism was not just about being called "nig-nog" and was not, in fact, that funny for those Black people in Britain who were experiencing it on a daily basis.

Section 3: The 1980s and 1990s: 'Alternative' Racisms?

The political locations of the comic form became more obvious and widely recognised in the 1980s, as an increasing number of comedy artists began to foreground political issues in their acts. The establishment of the Comedy Store in London in 1979 (the year in which Margaret Thatcher came to power), gave rise to a British comedy renaissance where the type of humour that had once formed the backbone of British comedy (racist, sexist, homophobic), was now ardently avoided. 'Alternative comedy' as it became known, was widely perceived as 'left wing', 'anti-establishment' and 'politically correct'; outrageous in its directness, but selective in its new satirical targets. The non-sexist, non-racist premise of the jokes meant that Blacks, Jews and women were no longer the prime targets of the comedy. Starting as a fringe activity, alternative cabaret began to occupy the mainstream comic agenda and influence television's approach to British comedy. This shift was partly in response to the general political drift towards the Right in the 1980s, and represented a new climate of cultural sensitivity towards 'minority' communities. Hence, many of these alternative comedians used the comic mode to simultaneously critique the terms of both traditional British comedy and the wider political situation. What the alternative comedians collectively signalled was that comedy does need targets, but that these were not fixed in stone and desperately needed to change.

Older comedians such as Jim Davidson and Bernard Manning, who relied heavily on racist rhetoric in their acts, were increasingly seen as traditional, out-dated and conservative alongside

their new liberal colleagues. It is telling that Manning, when first discovered by Granada's **The Comedians** in 1971, rarely told a racist joke. This only became the staple part of his stand-up routine in the early 1980s. This could have cost him his privileged position as a mainstay of British light entertainment since British television comedy was never really at ease with airing barefaced (i.e. not in the name of irony or 'balanced out' by an equally prejudiced response) racist rhetoric. Ben Elton, Rik Mayall, French & Saunders and later Jo Brand and Sean Hughes were to become notable examples in the new comedy wave. There were, ironically, very few Black comedians in the 'alternative comedy' set, although the general change of comic mood was slowly being picked up and shaped by television.

a) The 'Ethnic Sitcoms'

Of course, this new climate of cultural sensitivity was emerging at around the same time as Channel 4, so it was not surprising to see that two of Channel 4's early projects were 'ethnic sitcoms'. Some, however, criticised Channel 4's first 'ethnic sitcoms', **No Problem!** (1983-5) and **Tandoori Nights** (1985-7), for lampooning Black characters and perpetuating stereotypes of Black and Asian people, whilst others suggested that they represented a shift away from the blatantly racist 'name-calling' style sitcoms of the 1970s. One thing which these early comedies certainly did represent, was a more integrated mode of Black production, so that Black artists were more actively involved as writers, actors and producers. For example, the idea for **No Problem!** developed out of Humphrey Barclay's interest in the Black Theatre Cooperative and the writing and performing talent it had spawned (Farrukh Dhondy, Victor Romero Evans, Trevor Laird, Mustafa Matura). Barclay had been impressed by Matura's play 'Welcome Home Jacko' which he had seen in the summer of 1981. The theatre workshop culture was rife at this time in which different skilled workers came together to work through

various performance ideas.[11] This base, together with Farrukh Dhondy, Sue Woodford and

Humphrey Barclay's enthusiasm for a mainstream all-Black situated comedy, gave rise to **No**

Problem!, the first 'ethnic' comedy to come out of Channel 4 and its Multicultural

Programming Department.[12]

No Problem! was based around the Powell siblings whose parents had returned to Jamaica

after selling their family business. It could be considered a breakthrough in race sitcom terms,

with its use of patois and dialect, its roots in Black Theatre and as an all-Black situated

comedy. At the same time, there were some pointed criticisms that the series reinstated a

classic racist pathology which foregrounded disorganised Black family structures and distinct

myths around Black femininity and masculinity (absent parents gone 'back home', surrogate

mother in Angel, Sensi as 'hard' Black woman, Terri as predatory female type, Tosh as a

macho clown and 'The Beast' as roguish criminal) (Gilroy, 1983). It was the eccentricity of

each of these loud and jagged Black character-types and the anarchy of their lifestyles which,

once again, presented Black people and their lives as a source of humour. The self-

consciousness of the comedy also came through with cheap gags about Asians ('Abdul the

camel driver' and 'illegal immigrants from Finchley') which wouldn't have looked out of place

spoken by Kenny Lynch's character in **Curry & Chips**. Producer, Charlie Hanson, admits

that the second series 'started to delve into stupidness' (quoted in Pines, 1992:189). While

Hanson maintains that the series was not political, for some Black people (many of whom had

endured **Love Thy Neighbour** and **Mind Your Language** only a few years earlier) it was

precisely that (*Radio Times,* 1984). In keeping with Channel 4's separate African-

Caribbean/Asian (**Black On Black/Eastern Eye**) programmes, the Channel began to broadcast

an Asian 'ethnic sitcom' **Tandoori Nights**. Like **No Problem!**, **Tandoori Nights** presented a

number of familiar Asian stereotypes: the unequivocally smarmy Saeed Jaffrey as the

entrepreneurial Jimmy Sharma who revelled in what he clearly saw as the 'social climb' in

dating White women; the subservient, bumbling, servant-fool in Alaudin (Tariq Yunus) who in

the opening episode, conceded, "I am a monkey, you are the organ-grinder, boss". Apart from

the host of anti-Bangladeshi jokes, there were poor production values, ham acting, and routine

lapsing into melodrama, which made for uncomfortable watching.

Of course, there was an inevitable burden of expectation on the first ethnic comedies (and the

only Black fiction shows to be on British television at that time). While many of the criticisms

revealed impossible expectations of the series (demands for 'realistic' and 'accurate'

characterisations, for Black people not to be laughed at in a comedy show, and for the series to

wipe out the whole history of 'misrepresentations' of Black women in the media - see the

opinion of No Problem! by the Brixton Black Women's Group in City Limits, No.126, 2-

8.3.84), the roots and context of this discontent also needed to be registered. Rather than taking

these criticisms on board, Farrukh Dhondy (who by 1984 was Head of the Multicultural

Department and decided to axe No Problem!) saw them as a futile campaign to sanctify

images of Blackness by those whom he referred to as, 'the nascent bureaucratic black middle-

class which lives off a grievance industry' (quoted in Pines, 1992:166). Of course, this was at

the time when there were, after years of lobbying and campaigning for alternative spaces and

representation, high expectations of a channel which was supposed to have been set up

precisely to challenge dominant attitudes towards race (see Chapters 1 and 3). We have to

respect then, that there was inevitably some disappointment that this much struggled for space

was flirting too breezily with well-rehearsed stereotypes of 'Blackness'. But what the divided

views about No Problem! and Tandoori Nights also revealed, was that there is no monolithic

reaction to Black programmes by Black audiences, and that comedy is a particularly tricky area, 'a double-edged game, in which it is impossible to ensure that the audience is laughing with, not at, the stereotype' (Hall in Givanni, 1995:21). It bears repetition, that the context in which these comedies were received and transmitted influenced the varied responses to the series. There was an implicit assumption behind the series that we had*now* reached the stage where it was alright to laugh at ourselves and have others laugh at us too. Of course the comedies had to deal in 'types' (because all comedies do) but, I would argue, that the main problem was these were overwhelmingly traditional *raced* stereotypes, and that the range of types and settings was bizarrely in synch with many of the more crude representations of race that British comedy had so far dealt in.

A very different Black-centred comedy which could be seen on British television at this time, was **The Cosby Show** (NBC/Channel 4, 1984-92), a US-produced Black family sitcom series.[13] While the majority of mainstream UK race sitcoms up to this point had favoured the conflict-based White bigotry/tolerance V Black bigotry/ ignorance/passivity rhetoric, **The Cosby Show** mastered international ratings success with the uncustomary image of cosy Black domesticity. Henry Louis Gates Jr has argued that while the eighties can be considered as 'the Cosby decade' (quoted in 'The show takes a strange twist', Gary Younge, *The Guardian,* 10.7.97:6), more realistic depictions of Black life in American comedies such as **Frank's Place** failed (on an international commercial basis) precisely because they were 'too true' (Gates in **Colour Adjustment**, Dir: Marlon Riggs, US, 1991). A lot of the critical discourse around **The Cosby Show** meanwhile, provided a unique take on the repetitive discussions around 'negative images' in that many complained that the representations of Blackness were 'too positive' (see Chapter 9 for debates around **Handsworth Songs** and **My Beautiful Laundrette**). Many

felt that **The Cosby Show**, as well as being unrealistic, was distinctly 'un-Black'. The

Huxtables, it was argued, could have been any colour and the wider context of racism was

undermined by the series' 'aspirational thesis' which implied that underachievement was a

matter of individual choice (see Jhally and Lewis, 1992 for a range of views). The Huxtables

however, did often display a Black political, moral and social conscience and storylines were

frequently developed to highlight this. (I would hazard a guess that if a mainstream equivalent

of **The Cosby Show** or **The Fresh Prince of Bel Air** had been devised in Britain, the

possibilities of such a comfortable Black-British existence could only have been done through

satire.) **The Cosby Show**, although implicitly conservative, also managed to depict African-

American upper middle class life as 'normal' and break away from always trying to negotiate

the 'Blackness' of its characters and frame their lives through race-related problems. Those so

quick to criticise Cosby's cosiness would have done well to take a look at **No Problem!** and

Tandoori Nights to realise that sanitised versions of the diaspora were the least of Black

comedy's problems.[14]

Apart from the comedies I have referred to in this part of the section and a brief BBC sitcom

The Front Line (BBC1, Tx:6.12.84-17.1.85), which centred on two Black brothers (Sheldon,

a Rastafarian trouble-makers and Malcolm, a security officer), the 1980s saw very little in the

way of Black situation comedy. **Desmond's** (Channel 4, 1989-94) was Channel 4's main

offering. It came to an end following the death of its lead actor, Norman Beaton in December

1994. Opinions were characteristically divided about **Desmond's,** but it was one of the few

Black shows to successfully reach a mainstream audience in Britain and also proved popular in

the Caribbean and America where it was broadcast on Black Entertainment Television (BET).

In 1992, the series won Channel 4's Best Sitcom Award. **Desmond's** moved away from the

lazy assumption that having Black actors fronting a sitcom was, in itself, enough. Trix Worrell

(writer and director of the series since 1989) and Humphrey Barclay were keen, 'to make sure

that they were positive. We wanted to say something positive about black families and, more

importantly, about migrant families within this country and what it is to be Black in England'

(Worrell, quoted in Pines, 1992:184). **Desmond's** built its characters around different

(regionally, politically and generationally) Black types. Based in 'Desmond's, a barber shop in

Peckham, the series was unique as a Black comedy which was set in the workplace, although

the family was still the focal point (Malik in Newcomb, 1997). In addition, **Desmond's** had its

own distinct method of team writing which became a training-ground for many new writers.

Carmen Munroe who played Shirley Desmond saw **Desmond's** as a landmark programme in

that, 'we have successfully created a space for ourselves, where we can just be a real, honest,

loving family, with problems like lots of people, and we can present that with some degree of

truth and still not lose the comedy' (quoted in Pines, 1992:64).

Apart from **Desmond's** brief spin-off, **Porkpie** (Channel 4, 1995-1996) and **In Exile**

(Channel 4, 1998, Ist Tx:14.1.98), there have been no Black sitcom-based shows in recent

years. **Porkpie**, which starred Ram John Holder as an elderly, solitary lollipop man turned £10

million lottery winner (and also featured Derek Griffiths and Llewella Gideon) received

favourable reviews, but was only commissioned for two series of six episodes. **In Exile**

(Channel 4, 1997), was a bizarre comedy, based on a deposed military dictator of the African

Republic of Kumeria, General Alfred Providence Mukata (Patrice Naiambana), in exile in

Britain (St. John's Wood). Written by new writer, Tubde Babalola, it also starred Fraser James

as Solomon, the former head of the general's guards. Whilst the comedy did play on common

stereotypes of Africans (for example, that they are animals in the bedroom, and have better

rhythm), the series produced some well-choreographed farcical moments and the acting was good.

b) CASE STUDY 2: Lenny Henry

It was only really in the 1980s that distinguished Black artists such as Lenny Henry, Norman Beaton and Carmen Munroe were able to creatively refute that Blacks necessarily had to be the objects of humour. Lenny Henry is open about the fact that in the early part of his career, he found himself being pushed (rather than choosing to jump) down a certain racist route in order to gain a passport to media access. For example, he did a stint touring with **The Black and White Minstrels**. Henry went on to work with **Cannon And Ball** in the mid-1970s, which gave him both exposure and experience. He played Sonny Foster in **The Fosters** (1976) and then reached an even wider audience with the cult Saturday morning kids programme **Tiswas** (ATV/Central TV/ITV, 1979-82), where he began to formulate characters such as Algernon Razzmattazz (a Rastafarian who ate condensed milk sandwiches) and Nat West the preacher. He describes his subsequent experience on the sketch comedy show **Three Of A Kind** (BBC1, 1981, 1983) as a useful learning experience, but also recognises that the two Whites/one Black formula was, 'a safe package in a way - we've got two white people and we'll have this black guy in the middle. We don't want to frighten anybody. It was almost like being spoon-fed to the British public' (quoted in Pines, 1992:213).

By this time, Lenny's gift for creating comic characters and witty vignettes of West Indian life in Britain was firmly being established and he became well-known for characters such as the African television host, Josh Arlog and Black politician Fred Dread. Henry admits that a lot of the material he was doing up to the time of **OTT** (Central TV/ITV, 1983, the late-night

equivalent of **Tiswas**) 'was very self-depricating, very self-detrimental' and that he had found

himself simply fulfilling others' expectations of him to be another Charlie Williams (see Henry

in Pines, 1992:213-4). Henry recalls that it was only in the early 1980s, largely due to the

influence of **The Young Ones** and **The Comic Strip** and his regular appearances on *the* talent

launch-pad of the 1980s, **Saturday Night Live**, that he began to purge himself of his

traditional variety training and thought, 'Oh, so you don't have to take the piss out of

yourself. You can actually just do material that's funny about where you're from. You don't

have to be racist or sexist, but you can be racy and sexy' (quoted in Pines, 1992:215).

Lenny's big break came with the tide of alternative comedy and his own show **The Lenny**

Henry Show (BBC1, 1984-5, 1987-8) featured caricatures such as PC Ganga, Deakus,

Theophilus P. Wildebeeste and Delbert Wilkins (Malik in Newcomb, 1997:755-756). Although

Henry was criticised by some for dabbling with well-established stereotypes of Black

masculinity, he claimed that he hoped to expose the idiocy of them; that rather than avoiding

stereotypes he wanted to confront them head-on. Set in a pirate radio station, Delbert was a

Brixton wide-boy character created at around the same time as the real life Brixton riots. The

narrative was structured around the central (postmodern?) joke of Delbert's quest to get into

the media as well as introducing a number of themes around language, music, Black

masculinity, inner city life, authority and access. The best of Lenny Henry consciously used a

range of stereotypes to expose them. **The Lenny Henry Show** succeeded in what **No**

Problem! had attempted to do, by producing, coordinating and subverting a number of types

and 'in' and 'out' jokes to which different audiences were invited to respond. Moreover, the

changes in Henry's career demonstrated a noticeable scale of 'progression', marking Henry's

sophistication in directing his audiences in new ways.

By the late-1980s, Henry began to broaden his repertoire even further into film, television drama[15] and his own production company, Crucial Films, which was established in 1992 to not only launch film and comedy projects but to also specifically encourage Black performers and producers. He initiated the Step Forward comedy-writing workshops in conjunction with the BBC (which in turn, led to **The Real McCoy**). By this time, Henry had created a number of wildly diverse characters which not only had something to say about current preoccupations, but which appealed to multifarious audiences across distinct light entertainment forms. He won many awards including two Variety Club Awards, BBC Television Personality (1983) and Show Business Personality (1989). In 1993, Henry won the Radio and Television Industry Award for 'BBC Personality of the Year' and was nominated for a BAFTA in the Light Entertainment Category in 1984 (for **The Lenny Henry Show**). In 1997, Henry hosted the BAFTA awards ceremony. His most recent series, **Lenny Goes To Town** (BBC1, Tx:5.9.98-), was screened at peak-time on a Saturday evening and saw Henry take his live act around Britain. These are phenomenal successes for a Black-British performer, particularly for one who made his name on British television.

Although Henry emerged out of the official variety tract, he is clear that he had to subvert its central logic of Black comedy in order to make the audience laugh *with*, not *at* Black people. It had taken years of dependency on writers, production teams and comic traditions before he was able to reach a state of relative autonomy and control over his own work. The question, as has been posed by Paul Gilroy, is whether Henry has, since then, succeeded in spite, or because of, the increasing politicisation of his work. The consistency of Henry's success, from teen hopeful to middle age, has also been noted for breaking with what Gilroy has called 'the

age structures of representation around race' (Gilroy in **Black and White in Colour** archive interviews) which has seen so many Black comedians sustained as childish personae. In short, Henry has, through his work, been allowed to 'grow up'.[16] This was most obviously seen in Henry's next television comic incarnation, the erratic Head Chef Gareth Blackstone in **Chef!** (BBC1, 1993-96), a series which maintained respectable-production values, tight comic-drama scripts and sharp lead performances. Isaac Julien notes how **Chef!** symbolised that black comedies, 'are no longer content to use racial difference just as entertainment for whites; instead the genre uses its own black epistemology to transform itself... the brilliant thing about **Chef**...is that it carnivalises both high and popular culture in true Bakhtinian style (Julien in Givanni, 1995:61). Indeed, the series, which was scheduled at peak-time on the BBC, took the traditional British sitcom into a more drama-based dimension. As well as diluting the division between 'high and popular culture', **Chef!** signalled how substantial investment (both financial and otherwise) can trigger a real breakthrough in drama (an otherwise limited zone for Black artists) *and* comedy terms.

c) New Black Comedy: Questions of Authorship and Context

"they were laughing at me because I was laughing"

(Muslim boy in Ayub Khan Din's theatre production of 'East is East'

following a session of his mates laughing at 'Pakis')

With the exception of Lenny Henry, and despite a general 'liberalisation' of British comedy since the 1980s, the post-Alternative era has remained remarkably White-dominated. As Cook notes, 'it is ironic that the movement which spawned this egalitarian sea-change has remained almost as white as the working men's club circuit that it set out to counteract' (Cook, 'The

Colour Code', *The Guardian*, 8.12.93:4). Exceptions to the rule have included Felix Dexter,

Chris Tummings, Malcolm Frederick Angie La Mar, Meera Syal and Sanjeev Bhaskar, all of

whom have recently been seen in television comedy (compare this to the US where most of the

Black superstars such as Whoopi Goldberg, Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy and

Will Smith made their names in comedy). The African-Caribbean and Asian comedy circuits in

Britain remain localised, small-scale and generally based on live stand-up work rather than seen

on television. Despite a slowly growing fan base and the popularity of live performance

venues such as the Hackney Empire, The Cave in Birmingham and the Cabarave in London's

East End, television access for Black comedians remains severely limited. Felix Dexter, who

was a regular fixture on BBC2's sketch comedy slot **The Real McCoy** (BBC2, 1991-95), **The**

A Force (1996-) and late-night topical comedy **It's Later Than You Think** (BBC1, 1997-8),

has spoken of television's resistance to Black comedians. He says:

> TV traditions tend to be conservative, and the TV establishment is resistant
>
> to black artistes in general. When they think of a black comedian, they
>
> always think of Lenny Henry...There's a self-conscious, privileged elite who
>
> have a fascination with black culture - but only because it has a quaint
>
> novelty-value. (Dexter, *The Guardian*, 8.12.93:4)

There are also certain assumptions about the type of work a Black comedian can do. Curtis

Walker, who presented BBC2's **Paramount City** and was one half of Black comedy duo

Curtis & Ishmael, argues:

> Could you imagine a Black comedian who was like Jack Dee? It could not
>
> exist. As a Black comedian you could not stand up there and be dry and wry
>
> like that. He doesn't laugh, he doesn't smile; a Black person could not do it
>
> because it's too threatening. A Black man being that deadpan would be
>
> regarded as threatening. (Walker, *The Voice*, 18.6.96:30)

The range and quality of Black comedy seen on British television has generally not matched

that which can be found in various repertory theatres, arts centres and occasionally on the

radio, so that a modified public awareness of Black comedic talent exists. By comparison,

White comedians such as Caroline Aherne (Mrs Merton), Steve Coogan (Alan Partridge),

Reeves & Mortimer and Lily Savage have become the media darlings of the 1990s and managed

to bring new ironic twists (no matter how irritating some of their incarnations might be) to

traditional formats of the quiz show, chat show, one-man show etc. I am not suggesting that

Black comedians/aesthetics need to echo White ones or that we can even categorise them as

such, but merely that Black comedians on British television have hardly been at the cutting

edge or been able to display a broad comic repertoire - and yet the genre is assumed to be one

in which Black people are fully licensed.

The main format in which Black comedians have tended to appear, has been in late night

sketch-based shows such as LWT's **291 Club** (1991), Channel 4's **Armed & Dangerous**

(Tx:21.5.94) and **Get Up, Stand Up** (1996-).[17] Channel 5 has also broadcast **Club Class** (1st

Tx:4.4.97) presented by Richard Blackwood and **I Know Where You Live** (1997) which

featured, amongst others, Asian comedian Sanjeev Bhaskar. Although these spaces are

welcome, the hit and miss nature of the sketch-show poses a problem (and gives many of these

comedies an air of experimentation which only the 'minority' channels dare to schedule). A

variation of the familiar sketch-format could be found with **Blouse and Skirt** (1996-), a

topical comedy review programme broadcast as part of BBC2's **The A-Force** late Friday night

entertainment strand, which set up a panel of Black comedians who played off questions from

the studio audience. Another notable example, not least because it represented a rare British-

Asian intervention in the genre, was the all-Asian sketch show **Goodness Gracious Me**

(BBC2, 1st Series, Tx:12.1.98-16.2.98). Originally a Radio 4 sketch-comedy (which has been

re-commissioned along with the television version), **Goodness Gracious Me** received

favourable reviews and a Sony award. The television version (scheduled in a favourable (10

p.m.) slot) featured Meera Syal, Sanjeev Bhaskar, Nina Wadia and Kulvinder Ghir. It

presented a gentle satirical twist on common stereotypes and attitudes towards British-Asians

(e.g. a sketch called 'Going for an English').[18] There were also a number of 'in' jokes which

offered the British-Asian viewer a sense of inclusiveness, as though the jokes had, in a sense,

been tailor-made for them. Although the series was a rare example which many Asians

themselves appeared to find funny, there were some criticisms that the humour still rested on

stereotypes of Asians. But this was, in fact, part of the point - to subvert stereotypes of

British-Asians (the strict parents, the young Asian clubber, the spiritual guru, the arranged

marriage, the Indian 'wide-boy', and so on) by working through them. As such, the series

inadvertently raised the question, 'When is a stereotype not a stereotype?'

Of course, the fact remains that a lot of new Black comedy does in fact 'play on/off' notions

of Blackness. The ambivalence over whether it is laughing with or at, although tricky to

stipulate, raises pertinent questions around text, context, audience and authorship. Is it the

contemporary political climate and assumptions of liberalism (the context) which anchors

some of these jokes and their possibly racist connotations (the text) out of their original

meanings? Can we assume that we are able to have a guilt-free laugh, that we are, in a sense,

'beyond racism' because Black people themselves are at the point of enunciation? Is the

subversive value in the jokes themselves or in who is telling them? The question also remains

of whether we can (ever) afford to make the comic mode exempt from questions of political

accountability? Does there have to be a strain between preserving our ethics and obtaining

pleasure, and is it possible to have what bell hooks has called 'ethical pleasure.'[19] There are no

straightforward answers here. But in attempting to resolve some of them, the context-bound

nature of representation in general, and of comedy in particular, need to be recognised, and

endeavours made to avoid neat distinctions between the jokes themselves, those who are telling

them and the meanings audiences derive. The tension between what types of humour are

appropriate, unacceptable, universal or specific also readily depends on audience. As Hall

notes:

> Jokes about black life which blacks make about one another to a black
>
> audience - the generic, 'signifying' trope of distinctive vernacular popular
>
> forms in the black diaspora...can be 'read' very differently when played across
>
> a more culturally differentiated audience. (Hall in Givanni, 1995:21)

Of course, for many, the new Black comedy represents a readjustment of the rules on what

type of humour is deemed acceptable. One reaction has been to use it as a re-justification for

racist humour so that the ambiguity is played back on us by those comedians who now feel

they can defend their acts on 'Black people tell racist jokes too' grounds. The fact that Lenny

Henry's video **Live and Loud** contains over ten jokes about black people, but that he avoids

the same charge of racism, does for some, represent 'Political Correctness' - gone mad! As one

Talk Radio caller complained in his defence of Bernard Manning,' Lenny Henry is allowed to

be racist but we're not...It's *their* world... *We* have to be frightened of them' (Talk Radio, 'UK

Today', 25.4.95).[20] Those who defend Manning, say they admire him on the ground of being a

good technician; others say he is racist to *everyone* - not just Blacks. However, most people

put his sense of humour down to being 'just good fun' (as though racism which is 'fun' has

nothing to do with racism which is not!). One point surely is that it is the *attitudes* rather than

the *source* of humour which play a central role in how the joke is interpreted, and that while it

is up to the individual how they define their *personal* morality, television has the power to

mediate the grounds of *public* responsibility.

Conclusion

The most obvious thing that these various comic representations have shown, is that comedies

which feature Black people have generally depended on their ethnicity or their colour as a

principal source of humour. It is interesting to note then that perhaps one of the most

multicultural comedies which British television has ever produced, and one which has the most

'integrated casting', is **Red Dwarf** (BBC2, 1988-1996). Yet this is rarely considered as a

multicultural comedy - probably because the humour is not based on the Black characters'

(Dave Lister played by Craig Charles and Cat played by Danny John-Jules) race. In this

closing section, I want to consider and reiterate some of the points I have so far raised about

comedy. Firstly, the fact of ambivalence is central to the workings of comedy. Kobena Mercer

has, in another context, considered the wider manifestations of 'ambivalence'; that it functions

'as a complex "structure of feeling" experienced across the relations between authors, texts and

readers - in relations that are always contingent, context-bound, and historically specific'

(Mercer, 1994:174). Mercer shifts from considering the ambivalence, as he puts it, 'inside the

text' to that which functions outside it. So just as Alf Garnett appealed to different people's

sensibilities in different ways, Meera Syal's impersonation of an Indian accent can be

considered as mimicry and/or mockery. The fact that Syal also gets great media mileage out of

discussing arranged marriages and the 'between two cultures' syndrome might be viewed as

treacherous, strategic or enlightening - depending on your point of view.[21] But do we, as both

Gayatri Spivak and bell hooks have each suggested (see Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:472)

have to play the essentialist game in order to create something that is 'authentically ours' -

and, I would add, do this in order to get media exposure? (See variety chapter for more on this

in relation to popular culture in general.) If this is the case, then it is perhaps more true of

comedy (which mostly works through essentialist types), than any other genre. This is

perhaps why the majority of the programmes I have cited have attracted such diverse critical

attention, and why so many ethnic sitcoms have been considered an insult to 'the Black

audience' they often claim to cater for. A point that might help to break through the

ambivalence, is to consider that not all racisms work in the same way. Alf Garnett's is

different from Bill Reynold's, Bernard Manning's different from Kenny Lynch's and Speight's

claims to anti-racism do not, as I have already argued, deem his text anti-racist or eliminate

racist readings from the text.

The fact of comedy, as Medhurst reminds us, is that it 'can never be inoffensive. Attack and

hostility are built into its very structure and the skill in producing good, successful, political

comedy lies in finding the right targets' (Medhurst in Daniels and Gerson, 1989:17). As was

made clear by the alternative comedians of the 1980s, these 'right targets' are not simply

'found' but created (although any number of repeat viewings of the 1970s race sitcoms on UK

Gold - with the possible exceptions of **Rising Damp** and **Till Death** - go far to remind us

how far many of them were from 'good, successful, political comedy'). It is also clear that the

degree of defence of in/appropriate comedy has varied historically, so that the terms of

'acceptable humour' shift (recently screened episodes of sitcoms such as **Till Death** (1997)

have had their more caustic moments edited out for contemporary audiences). And today,

Bernard Manning is the bogeyman of British comedy; directly antithetical to 'acceptable'

views on 'race'.[22] The question here, is whether the same racist imagery can be deemed

acceptable - and then not - in different historical moments (see my discussion of **The Black and White Minstrel Show** in Chapter 6).

The second point I want to make is that today's comedy culture, although facing some welcome alterations in its approaches to 'race', is yet to fully integrate Black comedic talent across the board from performance to production. Charlie Hanson, in meetings for **The Real McCoy** realised, 'how ironic it was to have a group of white people sitting around discussing a black show' (quoted in Pines, 1992:192). It is clear who is still pulling the comedy strings. Furthermore, variations on the original racial clown type are still alive and well in many of today's leading Black personalities who, although they might not 'officially' be comedians, often spill over into the genre by virtue of their 'excessive' mannerisms. There is still a trend in television culture, to suffer Black fools gladly. TV chef, Ainsley Harriott for example (described by *The Guardian* as 'madcap', 'effervescent' and 'irrepressible', 9.7.96:19) is perhaps more notable for his endless hugging, singing and dancing than his culinary skills; Rustie Lee's big laugh is more memorable than her recipes (although she can be seen on Cable's Food Network) and Frank Bruno (as will be expanded on in Chapter 7) serves as national-hero-cum-buffoon. One senses that these figures are popular because of, rather than despite, their folly. **TFI Friday's** (Channel 4, 1996-) regular weekly slot 'Cedric's Comment from The Cafe', features an elderly West Indian cafe owner who comments on a topical issue. It is not difficult however, to work out that the joke is on Cedric, since he fails to ever make a serious comment and in trying, usually fluffs up his poorly-rehearsed lines. The fact that he has been given this 'prestigious' soapbox position makes Cedric seem all the more absurd, much to presenter Chris Evans' delight. Cedric is directed to say and do the most mundane things.[23] It is of course true that there have been a number of 'White fools' in television entertainment

history, although this has to be considered alongside, amongst other things, the range of White representations on British television in general. More obviously, it is not generally the White persons' race or ethnicity which forms the butt of the joke.

My final point is that many comic creators have appeared to want it both ways - to approach 'serious' issues but to also have the freedom to do it badly, whist always protecting the space of artistic production by resting on the 'just good fun' pretext. It would appear that many of those in control of writing and producing the earlier set of Black imagery in television comedy simply did not comprehend the impact of their creations, consider what Black audiences might want from comedy or how to portray Black characters without making them play the fool. The pursuit of having a laugh tended to mean the shedding of all responsibility. Robin Duval, Deputy Director of Programmes for the ITC, recently argued that the fact that **Curry and Chips, The Comedians, Mind Your Language** and **Love Thy Neighbour** were inconceivable today, was a sign that things had significantly improved in Black programming (CRE Conference, 14.3.96). Whilst there is clearly a new climate of racial sensitivity, we also need to consider how Black and White audiences have themselves changed and ask what it says about the traditions of British television that a central tenet of its comedy programming has been so obsessed with, and dependent on, racist humour. Much of the British comedy tradition needs to be recognised as working within a culture of racism, while using the alibi of comedy to give the illusion of being outside it.

NOTES

[1] Although this programme was the first to feature a Black cast in prime-time, it was criticised by many who felt it played on negative stereotypes of Black people. It was sued by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) who argued that, "every character is either a clown or a crook".

[2] Two episodes which foregrounded the issue of 'race' and which can be found in the archives, are **Intolerance** (Tx:27.6.66) and **The Blood Donor** (Tx:12.1.68).

[3] Till Death's successor **In Sickness and In Health** (1985-87) cast a gay Black character, Winston (Eamonn Walker) (nick-named Marigold by Alf) as Alf's home-help, thus setting up an opportunity for Alf to abuse not only his racial but sexual other. 'Marigold's sexuality and colour were the butt of the jokes, with his high camp demeanour and lines like, "I'm British with a gorgeous tan". Walker went on to play a quite different role as an undercover drugs officer in Lynda La Plante's **Supply and Demand** (Yorkshire TV/ITV, Tx:1.9.98-10.98).

[4] For example, 'Alf' regularly featured on showbiz slots such as **Dusty** (Tx:15.8.67), **The Generation Game** (Tx:25.12.75), **Sixty Minutes** (Tx:10.5.84), **Wogan** (Tx:23.7.86), and **An Audience With Alf** (LWT, Tx:22.3.97). Two feature films based on the series were also produced by Associated London Films, **Till Death Us Do Part** (1969) and **The Alf Garnett Saga** (1972). He has also been the focus of a number of retrospectives such as **Without Walls** (C4, Tx:25.10.94). The series ended after 53 episodes in December 1975, not because the programme was considered unsuitable but largely because of the unworkability of the comedy after the real-life death of Dandy Nicholls. When Johnny Speight died in July 1998, the BBC dedicated a night to his work and particularly to the Alf character (BBC2, Tx:1.8.98).

[5] It makes sense then that Darcus Howe appeared on **Without Walls** commending the Alf character but also appeared on another Channel 4 programme arguing that there was a thin line between racist jokes and abuse (**The People's Parliament** on Racist Comedy, 1994).

[6] A similar result occurred with the US version of **Till Death, All In the Family** (first screened in 1971) which featured Archie Bunker as a racist bigot who lapsed easily into racist name-calling such as 'jigaboo' and 'jungle bunny' to refer to African-Americans (Cantor & Cantor, 1992). Like Alf, there were assorted responses to Archie (Woll and Miller, 1987:78-81).

[7] It is interesting that Black-British feature films such as **Bhaji On The Beach** and **Wild West** have been widely criticised for being generically non-specific and for packing too many different (comedy and drama) tones and sentiments into one narrative (e.g. see Macnab, review of **Wild West**, *Sight and Sound*, May 1993:60-61).

[8] Muriel Odunton received a Variety Club Award for 'Most Promising Artist' in 1978 following her role in **Mixed Blessings**.

[9] Charlie Williams took over from Jackie Rae, Bob Monkhouse and Norman Vaughan as the host of the popular game-show **The Golden Shot** (1967-75).

[10] The Art Round-Up section of *Race Today* (May, 1973) reported that a teacher in a Scottish Primary School had said, 'that children in his school had made a coloured worker's life a misery, calling him names like 'coon' and 'sambo', having picked them up from the programme **Love Thy Neighbour**'. It is interesting to note that many of these comedies were commercially successful and attracted large audiences. **Till Death** achieved success both here and abroad; **Love Thy Neighbour**, as Rudolph Walker says, was ultimately designed as 'entertainment and to make money' (quoted in Pines, 1992:78), and the US cloned **Mind Your Language** into **What A Country!** in what represented the first sale made directly to US syndication. Twenty years after it was first made, **Mind Your Language** is now being screened in India where it is hugely popular.

[11] Victor Romero Evans' character 'Moves' had a regular slot at this time, on Channel 4's **Black On Black** (1982-5) commenting on topical events through the use of songs and comedy (monologues were written by Farrukh Dhondy).

[12] It is telling that many of the talents hand-picked to star in the series (most with theatre experience or child actors in programmes such as **Double Deckers**) are barely visible today.

[13] All the US-produced comedies that I refer to have been screened on British television, usually Channel 4, with the exception of **The Fresh Prince of Bel Air** which is screened on BBC2 and stars the hugely popular multimedia star Will Smith.

[14] It is of course, interesting that **The Cosby Show** thrived in the early 1990s, a time when race relations in the US were less than harmonious (mainly following the Rodney King trial and LA riots of April 1992) and that in this sense, the series seemed to adhere to the needs of network television and to those who could only accept a Black figure such as Bill Cosby (who was to become an anti-Farrakhan and anti-OJ Simpson spokesman). There was indeed, a sense throughout **The Cosby Show's** lifetime that the US *needed* a show like that. Subsequently, the Cosby/Huxtable persona (often collapsed into the same thing because of the programme's title and the apparent similarities between Cliff Huxtable and the 'real life' Bill Cosby) has developed as the cool-headed version of African-American pride and Blackness favoured by many Whites and Blacks.

[15] Henry also became increasingly involved in 'serious' acting roles and starred in the BBC's Screen Two **Coast To Coast** (1984). In 1990 he was signed by Disney on a three-film deal, the first of which was **True Identity** (1991), a comic-drama about mistaken identity. Henry also starred as a drug-dealer in **Alive and Kicking** (BBC,1990) alongside Robbie Coltrane who played a drug counsellor.

[16] Apart from the older generation (grand) father-figures in Cedric, Beaton and Channel 4's **Porkpie**, many Black comedic artistes have been made to maintain a non-threatening, asexual, cuddly, novelty status (Ainsley Harriott, Frank Bruno, Whoopi Goldberg). This was also seen in early Black characterisations such as Amos and Andy, Buck and Bubbles and in films such as **The Ten Little Pickaninnies** (1904) (Stuart, *Sight and Sound*, February 1993:12).

[17] On 27.4.98, Channel 4 launched a regular Monday late-night Black light entertainment slot, with **Nights Out at The Empire**, a variety showcase from Hackney Empire presented by Black comedian Junior Simpson, followed by a new series of **Get Up, Stand Up** (starring Angie Le Mar, Chris Tummings and Malcolm Frederick), and repeats of **Flava** (Black music show).

[18] It is interesting that sometimes the terms of humour, rather than being viewed as subversive, are viewed as a way of dealing with the problems of being British-Asian. Thus Richard Madeley stated how the **Goodness Gracious Me** comedians 'turn the culture clash on its head' (**This Morning, ITV,** Tx:9.1.98).

[19] This is a term used by bell hooks in a talk she gave at the BFI on 23.5.97.

[20] This was in response to the condemnation Manning received from the Greater Manchester Police Chief, for his 'vile' racist humour following a **World In Action** investigation which claimed that he could be called under Section 18 (Incitement to Racial Hatred) of the Public Orders Act (**World In Action,** 'Black and Blue, Granada/ITV, Tx:24.4.95). An edition of Channel 4's court-case style programme **The People's Parliament** debated whether Manning-style humour should be permitted in Britain. The verdict from the racially diverse audience was, "The CRE should be empowered under new laws to prosecute all those inciting racial hatred harmoniously or otherwise." It was concluded then, that racist humour needs to move out of the obscure public order arena into the field of race relations.

[21] Syal has made many appearances in British television comedies, including **Absolutely Fabulous, The Jo Brand Show** and **Sean's Show**. She also wrote scripts for **Tandoori Nights**.

[22] Manning's most recent television appearance was on the **Mrs Merton Show** (BBC1, Tx:19.3.98) when he was a guest-interviewee (for which he was paid £6000) along with actor/comedian, Richard Wilson. 'Mrs Merton' (Caroline Aherne) and the majority of the audience were all clearly repelled by Manning, and an argument developed on-screen between Manning and Wilson. Approximately 600 people were recorded as contacting the BBC to complain about Manning's appearance and about his use of the word "Paki".

[23] In an interview with Whoopi Goldberg on Channel 4's **TFI Friday** (Tx:1.4.98), Chris Evans declared that not only is he gay, but also Black. Evans refers to Cedric as "My Black friend", or "My old immigrant to these shores" (Tx:29.5.98).

Chapter Six

Thinking 'Blackness' through the Popular: A Question of Style Over Content in Light Entertainment?

It would be easy to assume that popular entertainment is about pleasure and therefore

essentially *not* 'about race'. Popular culture is, after all, 'an arena that is *profoundly* mythic'

(Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:474),[1] where we can be what we want - not what we

necessarily are, or are prescribed to be. As Richard Dyer notes:

> Two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment, as 'escape' and as
>
> 'wish-fulfillment', point to its central thrust, namely utopianism.
>
> Entertainment offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or
>
> something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. (Dyer,
>
> 1981:177)

Part of this 'utopianism' involves escaping (on an audience, textual and performance level)

from class and cultural distinctions, since popular culture implies cohesion. Light

entertainment is a zone where these categories are assumed to be able to collapse. This makes

approaches to reading race (within a supposedly 'non-racial' field) complicated; as though we

are attempting to extract something 'heavy' from something supposedly 'light' and scrutinise

with rigour something which is probably instinctive and based on the form of 'innocent'

meritocracy known as 'talent'. Indications of this have most clearly been seen with the lack of

critical analysis on the meanings of representations of Black people across popular variety

forms.[2] The comparatively heavy representation of Black people in light entertainment has

appeared to be 'just the way it is' rather than because of any specific race-conscious gesture.

In essence, this supposition pertains to the physical, the Black body and 'natural talent' which

have, through time, been assumed to enhance Black people's affinity with physical performance, of which light entertainment is often a part (see also Chapter 7). We have seen in relation to comedy, that the 'supremely ideological' facets of light entertainment forms do not operate outside the critical terrain of race but are, in fact, routinely connected to it. And if the fact of ambiguity (of text, representation and address) was established in the comedy chapter, then the story continues here, for Black popular culture is a verifiably contradictory space which cannot be understood through the binary opposition - 'high and low; resistance versus incorporation; authentic versus unauthentic; experiential versus formal; opposition versus homogenization' (Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:470).

In this chapter, I want to trace how the positioning of Black people in light entertainment has altered over time. Although I have loosely structured the first section of this chapter as 'variety' and the second and third as looking specifically at 'youth television', I am by no means suggesting that variety has *become* youth television. Of course, the term 'variety' sounds archaic today, but it was essentially an earlier term for 'popular culture'. It still exists on television in the form of 'light entertainment', which now incorporates anything from game shows to pop music promos to chat shows. I shall refer to 'Black popular culture' throughout this chapter, although there is no one thing that is that. Popular culture incorporates many forms - the comic, the soap opera, the poster, the National Lottery, and so on - but I will be focusing, in particular, on music and variety on television. Like all forms of culture, Black popular cultures are always changing, usually dependent, sometimes more, sometimes less commercially appealing and always with varying degrees of 'authenticity'. What I am particularly concerned with here, is how 'popular Blackness' has been translated on television, *which* versions have been maintained (or maintained themselves) and how youth and music

have influenced its treatment.

In Section 1, I will trace the early part of this history - thus looking at the centrality of Black (mainly American) variety artistes in Britain's post-war years. In Section 2, I will go on to consider developments in Black-British youth subcultures and youth television from the 1950s to the 1980s. In Section 3, I will enter into a more general but quite detailed discussion about some of the key shifts in Black-British popular culture in the 1990s, which I identify as a key area for change and exchange. My two main case studies are the long-running family cabaret show, **The Black and White Minstrel Show** (BBC1, 1958-78), and the late-night Black pop culture series, **Baadasss TV** (Channel 4, 1995-6) which, although stunningly different texts, throw up some interesting points of comparison about how the area of Black entertainment television has been institutionally defined. Popular culture, after all, is essentially defined by 'the populace' and, as I have so far been arguing, television does not simply reflect what is happening 'out there'. This chapter then, represents a slight departure from looking solely at television, in order to address wider shifts regarding questions of identity (personal, communal and national), the development of subcultural forms, and the unfolding and impact of new expressions of the popular. In this sense, I make the distinction between 'lived cultures'[3] and those seen in the province of television. In Section 3, I will deal with the former, to point to what the latter has frequently missed.

Popular entertainment is one of the rare instances where we really can say that, for better or worse, Black forms of expression have shaped *lived* (i.e. not always those seen on television) cultural activity. The importance of looking at 'lived cultures' or what Angela McRobbie has called the 'social practices of performance, production and participation' (McRobbie in

Chambers and Curti, 1996:34) are twofold: first, these aspects of Black cultural life have gone far in shaping versions of Black-Britishness which have, in turn, altered the shape of British culture; and secondly, many of these public moves and styles have helped to influence delineations of Black people on-screen. My approach may, therefore, appear to move away from the matter of television by touching on questions of youth, gender, performance and music, but to avoid these matters would be to ignore the relationship between how, selectively, television representations draw on (and refuse) lived cultures. So there are, in a sense, two separate stories here and I am loath to reduce one (the 'lived' cultures where some of the most exciting modern cultural transformations have been produced) to the other (television's selective interpretation or misrecognition of them) - as if to say that the former has been outmanoeuvred or resignedly inhibited by the latter, or that the 'lived' cultures have spent all their creative energies 'waiting to be represented' by television. In fact, as I go on to argue, the new hybridised forms and dialogic manoeuvres - or the diaspora aesthetics - produced by young 'Black Britons' today, have largely developed outside of the broader mainstream.

The significance of music to popular culture needs to be discussed both in terms of its influence on constructing new social identities and in relation to political economies (Shuker in Briggs and Cobley, 1998:158-172), and it is this blend of culture and commerce which increasingly dominates today's media industries. Although music industries are, in many senses independent, they also require extensive structural support from other media such as television in order to maintain themselves as commercially-viable commodities. A consideration of youth and music and its impact on the development of 'new ethnicities' is more directly addressed here (see Hall in Mercer, 1988:27-31, Gilroy, 1987, 1993). Paul Gilroy's work has been particularly important for recognising that youth culture has played 'a

special role in mediating both the racial identities that are freely chosen and the oppressive

effects of racism'. He notes how:

> The seemingly trivial forms of youth sub-culture point to the opening up of a
>
> self-consciously post-colonial space in which the affirmation of difference
>
> points forward to a more pluralistic conception of nationality and perhaps
>
> beyond that to its transcendence. (Gilroy, 1993b:62)

I want to consider how this 'post-colonial' space has been served or shaped by British

television. As well as taking on Hall's question 'What is this 'black' in black popular culture',

I also want to consider how the 'popular' of 'Black popular culture' has been defined. While

we can agree that television itself is a form of popular culture, this does not mean that it

always works in seamless harmony with other systems of the popular (e.g. film, fashion,

records, cinema). Television defines its own normative ground as well as mediating how it

treats other cultural forms. It sets its own parameters of what it regards as

fashionable/popular, high/low, mainstream/marginal, serious/trivial, and so on.

Section 1: Variety in the Early Years

a) The Black Entertainer

The naturalisation of the Black entertainer image has undoubtedly been perpetuated by its

permanency across diverse media texts and forms.[4] But the experiences of 'real life' Black

entertainers also reveals a legacy of performance entertainment as a form of abuse, control *and*

pleasure. Entertainment was a key facet of slavery, and built on European theories (which had

been around from as early as the eighteenth century) of Black people's natural mirth and

musical ability. Happy, singing slaves were generally preferred to discontented, silent ones, so

'dancing the slaves' to see the 'merry nigger' was common practice. This served two main

functions for the slave-owner: first, it was used as a justification for slavery - if the slaves were seen to be happy then there was no reason for them to not be slaves; and secondly, it served Europeans' natural curiosity and interest in African dance and music (see Pieterse, 1992). But music and dance was also sometimes used by the slaves themselves, not to 'keep them in their place' but as a 'prelude to rebellion' (Pieterse, 1992:132). The constraining *and* liberatory meanings behind the act of performance is an important observation here. This Black entertainer role was to take on a new twist in the form of the minstrel. Described by Kenneth Lynn as 'a white imitation of a black imitation of a contented slave' (quoted in Pieterse, 1992:132), the minstrel became one of the most popular early images of 'Blackness'. During the slave plantation days in America's Deep South, White performers would blacken their faces with burned cork to mimic the music and dance of Black slaves. Hence, this new White entertainment genre depended not only on parodying the Black slave, but on mocking the fact that he was seen to be happy in his subservience. The minstrel form of mimicry became even more pronounced after the Civil War, and when slavery itself threatened to be abolished.

To disassociate this early history from the ubiquitous symbol of the Black entertainer image today can only lead us to overlook the ways in which 'Blackness' has been, and continues to be constructed within entertainment. As Richard Dyer notes, 'How anything is made, how making is organised and understood, is inseparable from how we think people are, how they function, what their relation to making is' (Dyer, 1987:2). Central to the 'making' of the Black entertainer then, are the meanings derived from *looking at the Black body,* which relate to notions of difference (from the White body), power (in terms of the look) and society (holding traditional economic and social relations in place) (see Yearwood, 1982:43). In its modern incarnation, many have continued to reveal the apparent connection between the physicality of

the Black voice/ body and the prominence of Black performers as icons in entertainment culture (Mercer, 1986). Roland Barthes has spoken of this physical/cultural connection in his reference to the 'grain' of the voice, 'the grain is the body in the voice as it sings' (Barthes, 1977:188). One impact of this alliance has been that the image of Black people in the variety field has come to seem perfectly *natural*. So if we look at television's formative years, even up to the 1960s, we can see a stark contrast between the supposedly 'positive' image of African-Caribbeans as light entertainer-types (and athletes) and the mostly 'negative' image of them in actuality programming. But the degree to which we can assume that the relative acceptability of Blacks as light entertainers marked a simple 'progression', cannot just be taken at face-value, given the structures of dominance and subordination which the stereotypical image of the Black performer threatens to hold in place. In short, what did the Black entertainer image say about Blackness and to what degree did this enable the image to sustain itself?

The roots of the television variety programme were to be found both in vaudeville and radio. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the British music-hall was the main form of popular entertainment, but during the period of the First World War, (the term) 'music-hall' began to give way to 'Variety.' Radio contributed to the success of music-hall stars, but it also posed as competitor to the music-hall as a source of entertainment and leisure. The resistance of the early BBC (radio) to 'variety' was partly due to its image as 'low culture.'[5] Concessions were eventually made to this 'low art form', with Reith in 1928 putting a brave face on it when he declared, 'Let there be no idea that this category is one given grudgingly and under pressure from the public or press' (BBC Handbook, 1928:14). Music and dance, although they proved to be popular, were treated with uncertainty, and it was not until 1933 that a distinct Variety

Department was set up. Nevertheless, the first day of BBC Television was launched with a variety show broadcast live from Alexandra Palace (Tx:2.11.36) which featured, amongst others, Buck and Bubbles (see Chapter 5). On the same day, the notorious British Guyanese-born variety star/'racing adviser', Ras Prince Monolulu, could be seen on **Picture Page**. By 1936, the variety show had become a key television *event*, denoting nostalgia, occasion (e.g. television's first broadcast and its post-war relaunch) and community (diverse acts and audiences all working together). At this time, the variety show provided what Timothy Scheurer has described as, 'an anchor for an audience being exposed to a new medium...moreover, it offered audiences grappling with change, of which television was an important part, a form of entertainment that celebrated human qualities and reaffirmed traditional values' (Scheurer in Rose, 1985:307).

Prewar Black television celebrities included Paul Robeson, Fats Waller, Adelaide Hall and Elisabeth Welch. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s had given rise to a number of these artists.[6] Many Americans had travelled to Europe to find work on the stage and went on to establish themselves, usually through radio and later perhaps, on television.[7] Amongst them, were a number of Black women. Adelaide Hall became famous in jazz circles and for her vocals on Duke Ellington's 'Creole Love Call' (1926). She settled in England in 1938 and made a number of records for Decca and subsequently appeared on British television in various live broadcasts such as **Harlem in Mayfair** (Tx:25.2.39), **Dark Sophistication** (Tx:26.5.39) and **Variety in Sepia** (Tx:7.10.47).[8] Jamaican-born Pauline Henriques (who came to Britain as a child in 1919) made her name in theatre as Emilia in Othello in 1950 and radio (**Caribbean Voices**, BBC). Elisabeth Welch was born in New York but settled in the UK in 1933. She had her own BBC Radio series, **Soft Lights and Sweet Music** (1934), and co-starred with Paul

Robeson in the film **Song of Freedom** (1936) (for the London premiere of the film, Robeson

was hailed as the 'Greatest Singing Star of the Age'). Welch went on to make over 150

appearances as a singer in a number of variety shows and live broadcasts from Alexandra

Palace in the late-1930s. In 1946, she performed 'Stormy Weather' and 'St Louis Blues' in the

BBC's post-war relaunch, **Television Is Here Again.** [9] (See Pines, 1992, for extensive

interviews with Henriques and Welch.) Winifred Atwell, a Trinidadian-born pianist who came

to Britain in 1946, was the first Black performer to reach number one in the British music

charts (with 'Let's Have Another Party' in 1954). After a number of television, radio, live and

film appearances, Atwell was given her own series by the newly-formed ITV, **The Winfred**

Atwell Show (1956). Extraordinarily, Atwell also went on to have her own show on the BBC,

also called **The Winifred Atwell Show** (1957). We can note here the phenomenal

achievements made by Black women in the light entertainment field.

The showgirl has been described by Andrea Stuart as 'one of the most instantly recognisable

symbols of modern times' (Stuart, *The Guardian*, 2.9.96:8). Of course, the Black female

performer often faced discrimination or certain pressure to perform in particular ways. Lena

Horne was the first Black performer 'allowed' near mixed audiences (in the MGM musicals of

the 1930s and 1940s, Black performers were generally not seen on stage with White

performers). Horne signed a long-term contract with MGM, but it has been argued that she

was only deemed acceptable because of her European physical features and she herself admits

that she was expected to 'unBlack' herself (e.g. alter her expressions and movements) for the

camera (Dyer, 1995:28-31). Nevertheless, Horne was clearly conscious of the space between

herself and the entertainer role she played and of how the fact of her 'Blackness' was regarded.

She recalled, 'the only thing between me and them was jive protection' (Horne, *New York*

Times, 3.5.81:1, 24). Other Black women who were marketed as attractive (Jennifer Jones, Jeanne Crain) tended to look White (Burchill, 1986). Josephine Baker, a Black dancer who reached fame through her energy, theatricality and provocative dress (topless, banana skirt) became a Parisian icon, but the racially-coded acclaim she received, revealed the ambiguity of how the Black female entertainer tended to be viewed. Baker was praised for her 'apelike movements', her 'exoticism' and for representing 'the return to the morals of primal times' (see Pieterse, 1992:143).[10]

Visions of excess, glamour and escapism were at the core of the Black Diva type.[11] Race and sexuality were also often at the heart of 'diva-ness', but the fact of Blackness was rarely directly acknowledged. Elisabeth Welch recalls, "I never associated with the word 'Black', I never liked it", and when asked by Paul Robeson, "What are you going to do about your people?", she replied, "What people?", although this was partly to do with her own diverse heritage (cited from **Black Divas**, Channel 4, Tx:1.9.96). It is not only true that those were different times in terms of associations with 'race', but also that the variety mode itself appeared to *allow* an escape from those identities which everywhere else were being 'fixed' in race-related ways. It is perhaps no surprise then that one of the most common themes in many musical dramas of the 1950s and 1960s was the notion of escape and fantasy. **The Rise and Fall of Nellie Brown** (Anglia/ITV, Tx:28.12.64) centred on Millie (Selina Brown) and her disillusionment with an English Christmas, but it was Elisabeth Welch's singing performance which transcended the serious aspects of the play and which was noted in reviews *(TV Times*, 14.1.64). In Eartha Kitt's role as Teddy in the drama musical **Mrs Patterson** (BBC, Tx:17.6.56), music and dreams were her only method of escape. *The Listener's* review commented, 'Teddy has everything against her, illegitimacy, poverty, colour: she can live to

the full only as a day-dreamer, a play-talker, a fantasist' (21.6.56).

Popular Black performers during this time could more usually be seen in the cinema than on the newly-forming medium of television, particularly in the MGM musicals of the 1940s and 1950s. Richard Dyer however, has outlined the discriminatory treatment which many of these Black performers faced, or what he calls the 'sins of omission and commission'. He argues that the natural effect of community and pleasure produced in many of these musicals, concealed the actuality of hard labour and inequity. He also notes the centrality of Blacks as entertainers but never as characters with lives outside of performance or beyond entertainment (Dyer, Nov 1995:28-31). Within this context, the difference of Paul Robeson was notable. Robeson was first seen on British television on 23 August, 1939, in a ten minute live broadcast of songs performed at Alexandra Palace. He subsequently appeared on a number of variety programmes including **Val Parnell's Sunday Night at the London Palladium** (ITV, Tx:28.9.58) and **Paul Robeson Sings** (ATV/ITV, Tx:25.10.58). During the 1930s and 1940s, he also starred in a number of British films. Robeson not only became a 'crossover' star (so that he was 'rooted in a particular tradition of music with a particular audience' but 'somehow manages to appeal, and sell, beyond the confines of that audience', Dyer, 1987:67) but also applied his success to knowingly 'use his fame in an anti-racist way' (Dyer, 1987:x).[12] Nevertheless, whilst Robeson's voice and acting talent were highly commended, the types of roles he was cast in were widely criticised for perpetuating stereotypes of African people. Marcus Garvey was especially critical of Robeson (*Black Man*, Vol.1, No.7, June 1935).[13] By the late-1930s, Robeson himself became critical of the roles he was being offered and became more active in making decisions about final edits, etc.

During these early years, the taste was clearly for Black Americans. Pearl Connor (nee Nunez) who was an actress at the time says, "we learnt early on that to be American Black or to have that American gimmick worked" (cited from **Black and White in Colour**, BBC2, Tx:27.6.92). The emergence of the African-American star system was boosted by the rising independent Black media in the US (e.g. 'Ebony'), while Black Britons were still dependent on White organisations, media and recognition which, as we have seen, was scarce prior to the 1960s. Although most early Black stars were from the USA (e.g. Scott & Whaller, Harry Belafonte), some began to arrive from the Caribbean seeking work (they were sometimes accepted if they had an American accent). In 1956, Pearl Connor set up an agency with her Trinidadian folk singer husband, Edric Connor),[14] in order to support and promote Black talent (the agency closed in 1976). It was called 'The Edric Connor Agency', but became known as 'The Afro-Asian Caribbean Agency'. Pearl recounts how Edric (who died in 1968) 'had a strong sense of national identity which made him a pioneer of our folk arts in England. He was constantly promoting our songs, music and folklore, and trying to get people interested in our culture' (quoted in Pines, 1992:33). Pearl Connor also explains how their attempt to get access for Black artists in Britain was part of their general push for independence and equality (which at the time, also related to political and cultural struggles in Africa). The agency's role in promoting Black representation, involved practical matters such as rates, repeat fees, Equity and artists rights, but sometimes also involved finding lodgings for artists and giving them drama training (see Chapter 8 for more on the work of the agency). The agency launched a significant amount of young Black talent into big stage productions such as 'Hair', 'Jesus Christ Superstar' and 'The Black Mikado'. More importantly, they made the talent-spotting system respectable (if we consider that at the time it was quite common for extras to be hand-picked from Baker Street Station 'because of their behinds, or their eyes, or their faces or how

they walked', Connor in Pines, 1992:39).

Between 1953 and 1960, television generally became more populist and an unprecedented number of hours were broadcast. The impact of Independent Television (ITV), which began in 1955, helped to boost the amount of light entertainment programming. **Sunday Night at the London Palladium** (ATV/ITV, 1955-67, 1973-4) and **Chelsea at Nine** (Granada TV/ITV, 1957-60) became regular variety slots often featuring Black (many of them jazz) stars such as Sammy Davis Jr, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Cleo Laine,[15] Robert Adams and, of course, Winifred Atwell. Alongside these, there were a set of variety shows which were at the heart of a nostalgic enterprise to hark back to the (pre rock n' roll) 'good old days'. For example, **The Charlie Chester Show** (BBC, 1951, 1955) which featured the popular seaside trouper and radio performer with song and dance routines, **The Good Old Days** (BBC, 1953-83) which used an old music-hall variety stage complete with audience clad in Edwardian costumes, and the Scottish song and dance celebration, **The Kilt is My Delight** (BBC, 1957-63). Needless to say, Black performers were exempt from these regular, family-viewing slots.

Cy Grant could perhaps be considered as the first TV Black light entertainment star to be brought to the public's attention within a distinctly British context. He had a regular slot between 1957 and 1960 on the **Tonight** programme where he would present calypso interpretations of the news. Grant had previously been a serious dramatic actor and, although he appeared on peak-time television on and off for three years, he eventually felt that 'the public saw me as just a calypso singer'. He recalls, 'I don't think if I had asked to be an interviewer, that they would have entertained that suggestion. I don't think anyone saw me as anything other than a calypso singer, someone singing something that was very trivial and

expendable...while **Tonight** was great fun to do, there was a terrible price to pay' (quoted in

Pines, 1992:47). For many who had other talents and aspirations, the 'just entertainer' role

was clearly a source of frustration, because, as Dyer says in reference to many of the early

Black musical stars, 'All they ever *do* is entertain' (Dyer, 1995:29). Grant says his later

appearance alongside Pearl Prescod, Cleo Laine and Madelaine Bell in **Freedom Road**

(Associated Rediffusion/ITV, 1964), a music programme which featured civil rights protest

songs, and later in **Cindy Ella** (1966), a spoof of Cinderella set in the Deep South, proved to

be far more fulfilling (Pines, 1992). While obvious talents like Edric Connor were offered

performance roles, repeated requests to actually produce or direct a film or series for television

were repeatedly turned down. Following the 1958 Notting Hill riots, Connor put forward a

proposal to produce a series about Caribbean music and culture (**Edric Connor Sings**) for the

BBC, but this was rejected on the grounds of being 'economically unsound' (letter to Edric

Connor from Ronald Waldman, Business Manager of BBC Television Programmes, 21.5.59).

b) CASE STUDY 1: The Black and White Minstrel Show

> The minstrel visage - broad whitened lips in a blackened face, the caricature
> of a caricature - has become the most enduring of black caricatures. (Pieterse,
> 1992:135)

Perhaps the clearest example of how potential Black-British talent was being overlooked in

favour of more traditional images of 'Blackness' in these early television years, was **The**

Black and White Minstrel Show (BBC, Tx:14.6.58-78). What was to become a hugely

popular Saturday night television slot, had its antecedents in the tradition of minstrelsy which

had been central to lampooning Blackness since around 1830. The minstrel tradition, as I noted

earlier, symbolised an essentially pro-slavery and anti-emancipatory politics; it played on the

so-called 'natural mirth' of Black people, while supporting their representation as (contented) slaves. Following its popularity on the stage, the minstrel act developed as a distinct aspect of film (most notably **The Jazz Singer**, USA, 1927, starring Al Jolson), but in Britain, remained the province of 'Swannee River' style radio shows until its television debut in 1957.[16] The occasional television specials, which began with George Inns' production of **The 1957 Television Minstrels** (BBC, Tx:2.9.57) soon developed into a regular series with a forty-five minute non-stop format of Mississippi tunes and Country and Western Songs. Kenneth Connor and Ike Hatch, described in the *Radio Times* in 1961 as 'the two black looks' and GH Elliott as 'the original chocolate coloured coon', got star-billing.

The Black and White Minstrel Show won the Golden Rose of Montreaux in 1961 and while on television, could guarantee audiences of at least 12 million - but frequently topped 18 million. Spin-offs such as Robert Luff's production at the Victoria Palace Theatre in 1969 pushed it into the pages of *The Guiness Book of Records* as the stage show seen by the largest number of people. The pleasure many gained from the television version was undoubtedly to do with its slick choreography, but the novelty-factor of the visually striking blacked-up faces (the programme enjoyed a revival after the introduction of colour television in 1967)[17] was the twist that made the programme work (Malik in Newcomb, 1997:185-86). The series explicitly built on the racist minstrelsy tradition while guarding itself with the pretence of playing a (depoliticised) 'just entertainment' role. The show was essentially about nostalgia, harking back to the days of the Deep South when innocent White roses would be serenaded by the good Black slaves. Like other emblems of Blackness such as the Golliwog, the 'Nigger Minstrel' debased Black people and pertained to a particularly racist tradition of popular entertainment.

What many found offensive about **The Black and White Minstrel Show** was not just the fact that White people were 'blacking up' to imitate 'Blackness', but also the anti-liberatory meaning behind that act. The inappropriateness of the caricature in a multi-ethnic, post-colonial Britain (particularly when there were so few alternative images of Black people for television audiences to see), was, however, yet to be acknowledged by the BBC. In the early 1960s, the show became a public point of criticism directed at the BBC's racial insensitivity. David Robinson wrote:

> It is unfortunate that the BBC should have for so long supported such a
>
> quaint and uncomfortable survival. The convention [of blacking up] was
>
> better suited to a less sophisticated age when negroes were rare and decorative
>
> freaks rather than fellow citizens. There seems no logical objection to the
>
> genial and quite purposeless caricature. I can only record that my coloured
>
> friends resent it. (Robinson, *Financial Times*, 12.63; my addition)

Dennis Potter (then a critic for the *New Statesman*) wrote, 'One feels how nice it would be if our coloured immigrants really did have white faces underneath their inconvenient make-up'. (In hindsight, the awkward liberal sentiment behind many of these criticisms highlights the context and historical-bound character of racism.)[18] It is interesting too that Luff himself thought it would be 'utterly wrong' to allow the show to go to South Africa because he had seen how Black people were treated there (quoted in Woffinden, 1988:11). That Black-British people might find those same images equally offensive was not acknowledged, but these comments did reveal a certain amount of unease about the 'political correctness' of the show (although its commercial success in Britain no doubt shelved any need for racial sensitivity). At the 1967 Royal Variety Performance, Diana Ross and the Supremes (who were top of the

bill) refused to share the stage with the performing Black and White Minstrels. On 18 May, 1967, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination delivered a petition to the BBC signed by both Blacks and Whites who requested that the show be taken off-screen. Clive West, the organiser, stated that the programme 'causes distress to coloured people by showing them as a race who cannot be supported as serious-minded citizens. but as singing, dancing, idiotic people' (*The Times*, 18.5.67). Despite the fact that these and several other complaints were made, the BBC chose to follow its own judgment and continued to broadcast **The Black and White Minstrel Show** on peak-time British television for a further ten years. Nevertheless, Bob Woffinden notes how,

> ...the tide had turned, and for the BBC it had developed into a matter of
> competing embarrassments: the embarrassment of continuing to support the
> show weighed against the embarrassment of taking it off, which would mean
> both depriving millions of licence-payers of what appeared to be their
> favourite programme and also implicitly admitting that if it was wrong at the
> point that it was taken off, then it must have been wrong all along.
> (Woffinden, 1988:11)

Perhaps the most tragic part about the BBC's nostalgic commitment to **The Black and White Minstrel Show** was that it was so far removed from the exciting cultural changes that were happening in Britain, particularly towards the latter years of its transmission. It was easy to fall for the myth of absence and silence amongst 'real life' Black people - that because they were not visible on-screen, they were not culturally active. This was certainly not the case.

Section 2: Presenting 'Youth' in Television Light Entertainment

a) The 1950s and 1960s

Alongside these institutional modes of variety, Britain's youth were developing their own

forms of popular culture. The birth of a youth-exclusive music was Rock and Roll, alongside

the rise of a distinct 'youth culture' - which represented one of *the* most significant popular

social shifts of the twentieth century. But the youth phenomenon came increasingly to be seen

and regarded as a threat to safe, conventional societal values and from the 1950s onwards,

provoked a series of what Stanley Cohen has described as 'moral panics' (Cohen, 1972).[19]

These moral panics, disseminated by the media, were rooted in different fears but focused on

those conditions, individuals or social groups which were seen to pose a threat to the dominant

mores and 'culture' of adult White society. The mid to late-1950s can be identified as a pivotal

moment here: first, because of the panics about teen violence and hooliganism which reached

their peak around the time of the 1958 Notting Hill riots; and secondly, because of the rhetoric

around 'permissiveness' as a response to emerging youth popular cultures, such as rock n'

roll.[20]

Between 1954 and 1956, the sounds of Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley

and Jerry Lee Lewis were increasingly being picked up in Britain, mostly by working-class

youth. Consequently, a general concern about the 'Americanisation' and 'levelling down

process' (or 'dumbing down') of British culture, language and tastes ensued (Hebdige,

1982:194-218). The bulk of the new music drew on black African-American musical roots,

marking the beginning of a long history of White artists working with and co-opting 'Black'

music traditions, and bringing new fears about the infusion of Black cultures into White

society.[21] What began to be widely perceived as the 'negative' or 'delinquent' dimensions of

new popular teen tastes and trends was, therefore, essentially associated with race or 'race

relations' (i.e. Teddy Boys Vs. Blacks) and class (working-class youth). The more positive,

clean side, or what Andy Medhurst has called the 'scrubbed and sexless' aspects of British

youth, seen in movies such as **It's Great To Be Young** (Dir: Cyril Frankel, GB, 1956), tended

to be depicted as 'whiter-than-white' (Medhurst in Romney and Wootton, 1995:62).[22] Thus,

the image of British youth also provided the contradictory conception of youth as something

exuberant, energetic and radical as well as threatening. This, of course, fits into the broader

ideology of consensus, affluence and prosperity during the mid-1950s economic boom (see

Chapters 1 and 2). Dick Hebdige's categorisation of images of youth refers to this diverse

stereotype as 'youth as fun' and 'youth as trouble' (Hebdige, 1988:19); convenient scapegoats

located, at different times, at the heart of the best and worst of the nation. Images of youth

perfectly embodied that dual structure of representation.

Early television, in general, was hesitant about providing for a teen-exclusive audience, so that

even when these new teen popular forms were seen, they were sanitised - usually packaged as

domestic, 'family-oriented' variety programmes (see Hill in Corner, 1991). And the light

entertainment television genre, at large, was still predominantly a blend of international

crooners, variety acts and show-business personalities (Chambers, 1986). The introduction of

Independent Television in 1955, had some impact on changing this, and the whole tone of light

entertainment programming soon began to shift towards a more populist, modern and leisure-

oriented approach. This, of course, also had a largely negative effect when it came to the public

success of the older generation of Black musical artistes (mentioned in Section 1). An

identifiable split between adult and teen popular tastes only began significantly to be catered

for by television in the late-1950s, when the first set of youth-exclusive programmes began to

emerge. Armed with the fresh concept of the 'teenager',[23] a realisation of the significance of

(largely American) popular music to British youth, alongside the fact of their spending powers

since the immediate post-war years, British television embarked on a project, albeit cautiously,

to attract this new demographic group to television. Notable examples were **Cool For Cats**

(A-R/ITV, 1956-61), a thrice-weekly programme which played new releases backed up by

dance routines, and **Six-Five Special** (BBC, 1957-8), the first teenage television show to

feature a live studio audience (it featured acts such as the Jazz Couriers with Tubby Hayes and

Ronnie Scott). The huge impact of African-American music expanded with the Blues and beat

scene of the late-1950s and early 1960s, with Black all-girl groups such as Martha and the

Vandellas, The Supremes, the Ronettes, and with Black American singers such as James

Brown, Marvin Gaye, Mary Wells and Otis Redding. Ska music began to make an impact by

the early 1960s, marking the growing taste for West Indian music amongst British people. But

British (and for that matter American) television was generally resistant to profiling Black

artists and these newly emerging cross-cultural forms. Black acts would be invited to make

brief guest appearances, but rarely took centre stage in any other capacity.[24] Kenny Lynch

(see Chapter 5), a rare Black-British-born example, made regular appearances in shows such as

The Beat Room, Thank Your Lucky Stars and **Ready Steady Go**. Also popular were teen

shows such as **Oh Boy!** (ABC/ITV, 1958-9), **Drumbeat** (BBC 1959) and **Juke Box Jury**

(BBC, 1959-67, 1979, 1989, 1990). Although not strictly 'youth entertainment', there were

also a number of popular talent-spotting variety programmes such as **Opportunity Knocks**

(ITV, 1956,1964-67, 1968-78) and a few years later, **New Faces** (ATV/ITV, 1973-8) and

Search For A Star (LWT/ITV, 1979-81).

b) Developing Popular Counter-Narratives in the 1970s and 1980s

Up to the 1970s, there was limited access in mainstream spaces for those wanting to hear

Black-originated and performed popular music. Black people in Britain had to rely on those

few 'specialist' radio programmes (which began to emerge by the late-1970s), which cared to

talk 'their language' or opted to play the Soul or funk music they liked. Access to Black-

originated music forms from outside Britain (Latin America, the US, Africa and the Caribbean),

such as Jamaican reggae and American soul, was blocked. This was partially solved by pirate

radio stations (such as the London-based Dread Broadcasting Corporation) which, in a sense,

developed what could be called an 'anti-language' to the publicly dominant youth discourses of

the time. Meanwhile, British television continued to show resistance to many Black artists and

thus to acknowledging the popular hold of funk and disco on diverse groups of people by the

mid to late-1970s (particularly on 'alternative' popular, Black and gay cultures). Interestingly,

the fascist Right did understand the 'dangers' of the renewed persistency and popularity of

Black popular music forms. In a 1979 edition of the National Front magazine, *Bulldog*, came

this warning:

> The record and the cassette is more powerful than television or the
> newspapers where youth is concerned. Disco and its melting-pot pseudo-
> philosophy must be fought or Britain's streets will be full of black
> worshipping soul boys.

It is interesting that television was directly perceived as *not* aiding this process, which was not

surprising since youth-oriented television at the time was yet to produce any music

programme directed specifically at a young Black-British audience, or anything which

registered the enormous range and pulling-power of Black diasporic music traditions and

styles. (The only notable exception here were the many programmes featuring jazz music and

artists, including **Jazz 625**, BBC2, 1964-66, **Jazz Scene**, BBC2, 1969-70 and later **Jazz on**

Four, Channel 4, 1982-83.) Between 1978 and 1983, around the time of Michael Jackson's

notorious success (see Mercer, 1986:33-51), there continued to be very few representations of,

or public access to, Black music forms or artists. There was a general preference for White rock

music (on shows such as **Colour Me Pop**, BBC2, 1968-69) and **The Old Grey Whistle Test**,

BBC2, 1971-83). In particular, disco music, with its glamorous sheen, tended to be looked on

with disdain (particularly by the left), and seen to represent the triumph of capitalism over

good music sense (Chambers, 1986:159). Disco was, in a sense, *too* popular for the most

visible (White) popular cultures and counter-cultures (punk) of the time.

But every culture has its counter-culture. As well as the middle-class 'hippy movement' which

developed its own alternative philosophies to the dominant youth cultures of the time, there

were, by the early 1970s, other exciting counter-cultures emerging, particularly emanating from

Britain's urban centres. As Henry Martin recounts, 'the mixture of sleaze and art and culture'

that existed in areas such as Soho in the late-1960s and 1970s, in clubs such as the Flamingo,

the 77 Club and the Sunset, and the influence of styles such as the Jamaican 'rude boys' on

White British bands such as The Beatles and Dave Clarke Five, were a sign of emerging cross-

cultural forms.[25] He recalls:

> In a sense, what you had in the 1960s in London was different but similar to
>
> what you had in Harlem in the 1930s. You had people coming down from
>
> the North of England to London, you had people coming down from the
>
> Caribbean to London and you had the whole thing mixing in this new
>
> environment in places like Soho and Notting Hill and so on. And the youth
>
> culture of the time emerged from that (Martin, interview with Malik,
>
> 16.5.96).

During the 1970s, there were important signs of an emerging 'dissensus' - to use Kobena

Mercer's term (1994:54) - with the prevailing liberal process, and new forms of cultural and

political identification developed amongst many Black people in Britain. First, there was the

empowering effect of Black Pride, the Black Panthers and the US Black Power movement since

the 1960s, with key Black figures such as Malcolm X, Angela Davis and Stokeley Carmichael.

The battle played out by the Black Power activists and the American Government became a

particular source of interest and fascination for many Black people in Britain, who watched the

drama unfold on their television screens (see Phillips and Phillips, 1998:231-3). Secondly,

there was the unifying effect of Jamaican Reggae and its leading icon, Bob Marley (who made

an appearance on **The Old Grey Whistle Test** in 1973). Although reggae had been a fixture in

West Indian communities since the 1950s, many younger Black Britons now began to see

Rastafarianism as a symbolic form of identification and were drawn, in particular, to its music,

culture and style. Thirdly, there was great interest in the sounds of gospel and American soul

music. Fourthly, a new set of assertive Black political and style icons were emerging, such as

James Brown, Ray Charles, Muhammad Ali, George Clinton and Isaac Hayes. Finally, there

was the impact of the Notting Hill Carnival (and the police and media's treatment of it)

particularly following the trouble which arose there in 1976.[26] Within these different contexts,

new forms of identification, style and subversion, and a distinct, if marginalised, Black-British

popular scene began to develop. Of course at this time, the second-generation of Black-Britons

were developing, and while there might have been an interest in the older generation's music

and culture, young Black Britons were producing their own unique versions of British

culture.[27] It was most obviously the new sounds of disco, soul and funk jazz which pertained

to the formation of a specifically Black-British popular sub-culture and to the birth of the

British soul movement. So there was also something very interesting happening between the

younger and older generations of Blacks in Britain, something which was making the new

generation produce their own spaces for cultural expression.

Isaac Julien says that for him, 1977 (the year of the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the setting of

his film, **Young Soul Rebels**), represented the emergence of 'very powerful counter narratives

that outlined new kinds of national possibilities' (Julien in Julien & MacCabe, 1991:1).[28]

These developmental 'national possibilities' were signalled in newly emerging 'hybrid' cultural

forms. One such example was Linton Kwesi Johnson (who went on to work on **Black on**

Black), who fused reggae music with voice and poetry to produce 'dub poetry' in poems such

as 'Dread Beat An Blood' (1975) and 'Inglan Is A Bitch' (1980).[29] Much of Johnson's work

was based directly on the Black-British experience and on incidents such as the New Cross

Massacre in 1981 (In his poem 'New Craas Massakha', Johnson said 'di whole a black Britn

did rack wild rage'). Caryl Phillips notes how at that time, 'There was nobody else articulating

what was going on in the streets of Britain for young Black people' (Phillips, *The Guardian*,

24.9.96:13). Black-British dub poet Benjamin Zephaniah was also featured on programmes

such as **Words Over Music** (Thames Television, 1986). Meanwhile, the area of popular music

became an indirect point of entry for those Black film-makers who were emerging in the late-

1970s and early-1980s. Many of them chose to profile Black music forms or specific Black

artists in their films. Terry Jervis, for example, came to the attention of the just-forming

Channel 4 through his film **From Gospel To Soul**, which charted the life of Sam Cooke.

Henry Martin, meanwhile, produced **Grove Carnival** (1981) and **Grove Music** (1981) which

aimed to give exposure to Black-British reggae bands such as Aswad who, although they were

well-known on the club circuit, were virtually ignored by the media who tended to focus on

White reggae-influenced bands such as The Police, The Members and The Motors. Martin

went on to direct the first WOMAD music festival.

Whilst it is important for us to register the significance of these early cultural moments in forging a new distinct sense of 'Black-Britishness', it bears repetition that the focus of our study, television, was yet to profile these developments in any prominent way (they were generally not depicted as representative of or 'central' to the British experience, although they were of course, partially born out of it). Up to the early part of the 1980s, these cultural formations could mostly be found in marginalised spaces (low-budget independent film, late-night scheduled slots, the early experimental 'multicultural' series, and so on). Hence, the majority of these 'counter-narratives' were being expressed outside television.

By the mid-1980s however, and following a series of important material shifts (see Chapter 1), the tenacity and 'pulling power' of some of the new Black-British cultural forms began to make themselves more publicly felt. Following the events in Southall (1979) and the uprisings of the early 1980s, it became more and more apparent that Black-British youth had become increasingly politicised and, further still, that 'the resistance and oppositional symbols provided by Afro-Caribbean political culture' had become 'central reference-points for the struggles of other young people' (Gilroy, 1981-2:218-19). There was a growing sense of Black youth as at the cutting-edge of 'street-credibility', and this was something which was being picked up and invested in across different ethnic and subcultural groups as 'signs of resistance'. The greater 'integration' and interaction between young British Whites and Blacks in the formation of new youth subcultures was a key sign of these changes, as was the new wave of interest in emerging US-based Black sounds and styles (for example, rap, hip-hop, sampling, cut 'n scratching). Black popular culture increasingly began to move from being an

underground phenomenon (notwithstanding its rarely appreciated influence on White youth subcultures since the post-war years), to settle in otherwise White-faced public spaces and, as such, began to shape Western popular styles at large (advertising, films, street fashion, television). The popularisation of new Black cultures served to highlight their broad and marketable appeal.[30]

This shift was not, of course, without its struggles against the overwhelming institutional 'colour barrier' that had traditionally been set up against certain kinds of Black performance. The resistance, in some mainstream influential spaces, had been very explicit, as in the case of the first phase of Music Television (MTV) (launched in the US in August 1981) which, with its *penchant* for Madonna, Springsteen and White rock, blatantly excluded Black music acts from its video play-list. In 1983, Michael Jackson (who by the 1990s, had been declared 'The King of Pop' by MTV) was kept at arm's length even though he had reached the Number One position in the music charts with 'Billie Jean'. Questions of commerce (or the fear that White viewers would switch off and sponsorship would slacken), determined that the racial representation of music in the 'official' public sphere would be essentially commercially-driven, concerned more with image-management than with choice, community or talent. Ironically perhaps, one of MTV's biggest successes was with its broadcast of the Ethiopian famine relief concert, Live Aid (July, 1985, also screened on the BBC) (see Chapter 4). By the late-1980s, Black acts were necessarily (partly because of their huge commercial success in terms of record sales) a regular fixture on MTV and in August 1988, the US-produced **Yo! MTV Raps** was launched.[31]

c) Blacks on 'Youth TV' in the 1980s

In terms of free-to-air programming, British television in the 1980s broadcast a number of considered youth-oriented shows, such as the anarchic **The Tube** (Tyne Tees/Channel 4, 1982-87), the broad-based **Reportage** (BBC2) and **Network 7** (Channel 4, Ist Tx:11.5.87), a technically innovative 'young' current affairs programme. **Network 7**, as well as being a good training ground for future young British-Asian media professionals such as Sankha Guha and Jaswinder Bancil, redefined (with its jerky camera-work, quick-fire cuts and lack of contrived slickness) television's generic approach to youth programming. Another ground-breaking venture, was the **Def II** (BBC2, 1988) zone which was targeted at 15-25 year olds and screened twice-weekly. Executively produced by Janet Street Porter (then Head of Youth Programming at the BBC), it included **Dance Energy** (a live music show hosted by Normski) and **Behind The Beat** (1987-91), a Black music magazine programme created, produced and directed by Terry Jervis. For Jervis, both of these series were a concerted effort to represent Black-British artistes (such as Junior, Apache Indian, Soul II Soul and David Grant) who, although they were in the Top Ten music charts, were rarely seen on television. So despite the fact that 'Black music' was being bought in hoards by the public, it simply wasn't being profiled on television, which revealed an obvious disparity. Jervis (who has a formidable CV and is currently a Programme Consultant for BBC Youth and Features, and a successful international media entrepreneur), says that his most rewarding television experience was prompted when he caught a glimpse of the Second World War commemorations on television, and realised that the Asians, West Indians and Africans who had fought in the war were nowhere to be seen. He decided to collect archive material and include it in the regular **Behind The Beat** 'Respect Due' slot. Jervis takes up the story:

> When I put it in, it was Janet Street-Porter at the time who wanted me to
> take it out. She said it had nothing to do with music. I said, "It doesn't

have to, it's just 'respect due', that's what we say in Black popular culture".

I was trying to relay that part of the culture and I won because it was my

show. So I put it out, and when people called up from all over the world who

had never seen that footage, it made me realise the power you have. (Jervis,

interview with Malik, 20.3.96)

Although Jervis's power was exceptional, the **Behind The Beat** and **Dance Energy** era did

mark the beginning of a more extensive sea-change in terms of British television's generic style

of presentation. 'Style' itself, the manner in which things looked and sounded in relation to the

fashionable, had become increasingly influential in the design and targeting of specific

programmes. By the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s, the overall 'look' of television

(in terms of visuals, tone and modes of address and across the board from rap-inspired beer

and building society advertisements to 'funky' graphics and presentational-style) had begun to

appear a lot 'younger' and, for that matter, a lot more 'multicultural'. Within and outside this,

young Black Britons were developing their own culturally-conscious and racially-coded ways

of being, and expressing this *through* the culture that *they* were making popular.

Section 3: Youth Television in the 1990s...and the Black-British Cultures it's Missing

a) New hybrid formations in popular culture

These new cultural formations, as I began to outline in Chapter 1, signalled a 'new cultural

politics of difference' (West, 1990), the emergence of diaspora aesthetics and the new 'cultures

of hybridity' (Hall, 1992:308). What distinguished these formations as 'new', was that instead

of shying away from or not drawing too much attention to ethnic distinctions, the young

culturally active, were now beginning to revel in it; proudly and playfully enunciating the

difference of the Black subject, whilst also insisting that there are, equally, many different ways of being Black - and for that matter, Black-British. This represented a novel twist on the 'anxiety', 'friction' and cultural pathology of being 'in-between'. Indeed, it was the 'in-betweenness' of cultural hybridity which made the new diaspora aesthetics so creative and challenging. Except here, it was the logic of fusion rather than the logic of friction which was being followed; so that the new ethnicities were not so much *between* two cultures as something new arising from both; occupying hybrid spaces rather than being excluded from both - Black and British. These increasingly differentiated, hybridised forms were emerging within what Bhabha has called a 'third space' (Bhabha in Pines and Willemen, 1989). As Paul Gilroy noted:

> Black Britain defines itself crucially as part of a diaspora. Its unique cultures draw inspiration from those developed by black populations elsewhere. In particular, the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for creative processes which redefine what it means to be black, adapting it to distinctively British experiences and meanings. Black culture is actively made and re-made. (Gilroy, 1987:154)

This concept of diaspora 'opens up' or disperses our understanding of the experiences, influences and cultures of different Black people. Through the new popular cultures, young South Asians and African-Caribbeans today, are insisting that they be understood and considered in more broad and complicated geographical, historical and political contexts - not confined to the local boundaries in which they are typically framed and interpreted via the dominant forms of representing 'cultural difference'. These Black-led popular cultures are now bypassing the dominant regimes of representing 'race', by cutting across its boundaries and producing their own, unique sense and versions of 'Britishness'. This redefinition of

'Britishness' is being fashioned within oral and visual representational forms and some of the most exciting of these changes have developed in the area of music, fashion, dance and film (see Chapter 9).[32] The entrepreneurial thrust of today's style gurus (like couture fashion designer Oswald Boateng, street-style millionaire founder of Joe Bloggs, Shami Ahmed, and the crossover mastery of musicians such as Tricky and Goldie) has pushed young Black Britons to the top of the style ladder.[33]

It is perhaps no surprise that, despite their virtual absence in the field of British light entertainment (and indeed the fact that their critical role in the process of hybridization since the 1980s has largely gone unrecognised), British-Asian youth are now at the forefront of some of the most exciting of these changes. This can be seen particularly in their reappropriation of music forms from the US (hip-hop, soul, funk), the Caribbean (reggae, sound systems) and the Indian sub-continent (language, popular music cuts).[34] Bi-weekly club nights hosted by British-Asian record label, Outcaste, fuse live performance, excerpts from popular Hindi movies, Asian hardcore dub and cryptographic, identity-probing, graffitied walls. Although born out of British-Asian realities, this produces something which, like British-Asian identity itself, draws on different sources, politics and experiences, and therefore cannot and will not be pinned down in any simple or definitive way.

Specifically, the visibility of British-Asian hybrid expressive cultures is something which has only reached national level since the early 1990s, with films such as Wild West, the 'crossover' work of Gurinder Chadha, the Chart sounds of Bally Sagoo and the high media profile of singer/DJ/presenter Apache Indian. At present, we are also beginning to experience the extremely belated hype of British-Asian musicians such as Asian Dub Foundation, Talvin

Singh and Nitin Sawhney. In 1998, Cornershop reached No.1 in the pop charts with 'Brimful

of Asha', a record about the best-selling, Indian-based, songstress, Asha Bhosle. The new

'cultures of hybridity', like all popular cultures, have also offered endless avenues for

commodification and visions of new kinds of cross-cultural difference: Asian kids wearing old-

skool Adidas; 'Wiggers' with Jamaican patois; 'Top Shop' selling colourful bindis for style-

conscious young girls; and the White 'karma-driven' Kula Shaker reaching the Top 10 with

'Govinda'.[35] The chimerical claim to 'being alternative' in the 1990s is essentially about

coexisting alongside other disparate cultures. The new cultures of hybridity often allude to

cultural references (films, language, music, people, places) which can often be traced back to

previous generations and linked to places beyond these shores.[36] The cultural *routes* of the

diaspora are therefore of central importance in understanding the essence of these hybrid

formations (Gilroy, 1993a). Of course, the new diaspora aesthetics are never one thing, do not

always deny their own versions of racial authenticity (as in the case of Hip-Hop) and are more

than the sum of the diasporas of their past. Looking at the new Asian music scene in

particular, it draws on a number of aspects. It creates its own language and values which reject

the 'negative' and limiting commonly-framed trope of angst-ridden, Asian youth, invested in

so heavily in mainstream White spaces (in yesterday's notion of 'between two cultures'; See

Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9).

Although there is a truth in the postmodernist's claim that the boundaries between high and

low, Black and White have become increasingly hybridised in the 1990s, it is also true, as Paul

Gilroy argues, that many of the new Black expressive cultures actually operate against certain

definitions of postmodernism. He cites Frederic Jameson's description of 'the new

depthlessness, the weakening of historicity, the waning of affect'[37] to argue that:

These cultural forms use the new technological means at their disposal not to

flee from depth but to revel in it, not to abjure public history but to proclaim

it! This cultural politics is not about the waning of affect but about its

reproduction...There is, in the history of these forms, a suggestion that the

grand narrative of reason is not being brought to an end but itself transformed,

democratized and extended. (Gilroy, 1993b:42-3)

The British soul band, Soul II Soul, are a good example here, as are the internationally-

renowned Fugees with their constant referral back to Black history, hailing of Black icons

(Muhammad Ali, Bob Marley), recycling of old sounds and pushing for the politics of the

future. They both extend and respond to Black cultural history.[38]

But the broad notions of hybridised models have been argued against by those who urge the

need to honour 'authentic blackness'; to root Black identities and cultural production in the

origins of its people (Molefi Kente Asante, The Afrocentric Idea, 1987). As Gilroy argues,

this 'Africentric' view brings its own limitations, just as the 'anti-essentialist' view which

overlooks the traditions of Black vernacular expressions and Black cultures does (see Gilroy,

1993a:72-110).[39] Both these perspectives, as Gilroy usefully identifies, pay little attention to

textual analysis or to the details of the art and music itself, choosing rather to focus on 'the

bodies of the performers', thus producing their own versions of racial essentialism which,

amongst other things, assumes that *all* Black cultural activity is either good (progressive,

historically-sensitive, oppositional) or *all* bad (exploited, commercialised, expropriated,

merchandised).[40] As such, it is important that we try, in our analysis of Black popular

cultures and diaspora aesthetics, to respect the critical distinction *between* good/bad *examples*

of Black cultural production, instead of assuming that it all has to be one thing or another,

which, in any case, presumes that there is such a thing as an essential (good/bad) Black subject.

Here, it is useful to note Gilroy's emphasis on the 'relationship between ethnic sameness and

differentiation' (Gilroy, 1993a:xi;) and his concept of Black music (and we could say, Black

cultural production in general) 'as a *changing* rather than an unchanging same' (Gilroy,

1993a:101). This entails breaking with those polarised, totalising and authoritative essentialist

or anti-essentialist theories of tradition, in order to accept that there is no 'pure' Black cultural

form, that all identities are pluralised, and that all texts do, in fact, 'work' differently. More

specifically, these contemporary expressive forms are partly drawing on

tradition/heritage/roots and partly on new influences/the multicultural/the diasporic condition,

and thus always producing themselves anew (see Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:465-475 and

Gilroy, 1993b:1-15, for critiques of the limitations of these two dominant positions on Black

culture). The dialectic relationship *between* new Black forms of cultural expression is what

connects them to the past and future and makes them part of an ongoing dialogue which is

never passive or extricable from other forms of public space. Nor is it extricable from the

tension between authenticity and exploitation, since 'popular culture' is always the tension

between the two. The changing mutations of this culture, its dependency on memory and

tradition, alongside its thrust to create something new have been outlined by Gilroy:

> New traditions have been invented in the jaws of the modern experience and
>
> new conceptions of modernity produced in the long shadow of enduring
>
> traditions...But the histories of borrowing, replacement, transformation and
>
> continual reinscription that the musical culture encloses are a living legacy
>
> that should not be reified in the primary symbol of the diaspora and then
>
> employed as an alternative to the recurrent appeal of fixity and rootedness.
>
> (Gilroy, 1993a:101-2)

The emergence of distinctive popular Black-British cultural trademarks, signs, forms and

figures have served, in some respects, to displace the hegemony of White popular culture in British cultural life and in turn, had some impact on the mainstream. As Hall puts it, young Black Britons have 'styled their way into British culture' (Hall in Gates Jr, *The Guardian*, 19.7.97:1). This is not to say that these new voices do not continue to be marginalised by the broader mainstream, but that the mainstream itself as a 'site of privilege' has become less tenaciously invested in by the young culturally active who are *themselves* making the hybridised, cultural forms popular or known. In fact, it is arguably their marginalisation from the mainstream which has shaped the ways in which Black popular cultures have developed, most noticeably in their investment in the past *and* in their awareness of the new diasporic conditions. As Hall puts it, this has 'led to linguistic innovations in rhetorical stylization of the body, forms of occupying an alien social space, heightened expressions, hairstyles, ways of walking, standing and talking, and a means of constituting and sustaining camaraderie and community' (Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:471).

b) 'Black Popular Culture' on British television in the 1990s

What we have been describing constitutes something of a 'revolution' in popular culture. In what ways has television responded to or shaped these new, hybrid, cultural formations? To a large degree it has, I would argue, done very little. In failing to acknowledge or significantly be part of many of these shifts at the time, television has looked unfashionably late or 'obvious' in terms of responding to the popular. Of course, this is the fundamental strain in trying to make the genuinely 'alternative' part of the mainstream or universally-owned. 'Real Cool' (as Tony Blair's brief but fundamentally doomed affair with what he saw as the 'cool' elements of British popular arts and music beautifully demonstrated - i.e. 'Cool Britannia'), can never simply or completely be co-opted. This can partly be attributed to television's lengthy and

sluggish production process, and its ongoing submission to the print media's green light as to

what is and is not *now* 'cutting edge'. This 'misfiring' or lagging response to 'lived' popular

cultures, has become a key feature of television's attempts to take on some of these new

motifs of 'street-credibility' in order to address young Black Britons as well as validate its

own modernity.[41] This is not to suggest that Black-British popular cultures are antithetical to

commercialism (in fact, they have proved to be quite the opposite), but that British television

has not been the most obvious space in which they have become popular.

My point here, is that television largely positions itself outside the new Black-British lived

cultures and yet is obliged to establish a significant working arrangement with them.

Meanwhile, the lived cultures largely maintain themselves on their own terms, by remaining

external to the formal culture that is television. But this is not to say that they are waiting to

be 'represented'. Marginality notwithstanding, they are, in fact, more productive today than at

any other time. The pick and mix, DIY cultural methods of the moment have been aided by the

rise of new technologies and techniques such as digital sampling.[42] Music in particular, is one

of the few areas where Black Britons today are not dependent on the provisions of alternative

local market-places or access points. It is now possible to reach Number One in the music

charts with a song made on cheap equipment, recorded in the bedroom (e.g. White Town). The

economies of today's artistic production offer the possibilities of virtually instant cultural

turnover which, in turn, provides the much sought after novelty-factor. Playing with pleasure

and fantasy is mostly being done in alternative public spheres to television which usually

positions itself as a closed or distant culture. The outsider status ascribed to most young

Blacks is filled in more 'yielding' spaces, where productive activity can be directly engaged in.

This must not necessarily be seen as a reaction *against* television by the young culturally

active, but as an understanding that there is simply more (negotiable) room elsewhere for

cultural enterprise and production.

One attempt to bring Black-British light entertainment to screen was **The A-Force** (BBC2, 1st

Tx:19.10.1996-97), a Black strand broadcast over ten Friday nights. At the time, Dele Oniya,

Executive Producer of the most recent African-Caribbean Unit based at BBC North in

Manchester, explained the motivation behind the series:

> We want to show black people in all our diversity and provide an insight
>
> into aspects of Black culture, our abilities, our values, our nuances and our
>
> ways of communicating that are still largely unknown to the wider
>
> community because images of black people on television have been so
>
> limited. (Oniya, BBC Press Pack, **The A-Force**)

Despite such broad claims, **The A-Force**, I would argue, generally failed to represent Oniya's

vision of diversity. Representing and catering for a very narrow category of the Black-British

public, **The A-Force's** interpretation of the 'Black popular' looked curiously passe - at least

ten years out-of-date. In addition, it often resorted to Black people playing the fool

(particularly in its shameful dating show, **Get It On**). Its strong tabloid approach (tabloid-

cheap rather than tabloid-popular), with no obvious expenses spared on production, clearly

worked to the series' detriment. There was also a lack of promotion around the zone (only

brief press listings for example). Perhaps the best part of the series, **The Beginners Guide**

To... (a short explanation of a certain subject from Fanon to melanin) was screened close to 1

a.m. The short music feature, **What's The 411** (presented by Radio 1 DJ, Mark Tonderai),

although it brought popular Black music to screen, probably missed its target audience, the

majority of whom would be out clubbing at that time on a Friday night. It was, on the whole,

not a very well-thought through zone. That a Black-British light entertainment zone has to

exist at all is a sign of a lack elsewhere, and a reminder that Black popular cultural expression is

still remarkably perceived by some television-executives as a minority-based 'folk-culture'

(Bennett, 1981:77-86).

There are further points to make about television's dominant approach to representing new

Black-British popular cultures. The first, is that alternate cultures need to be considered in

relation to the broader economic, commercial and production contexts with which they often

intersect. All popular cultures, as we have seen, do not have equality of access, rights to

distribution, promotion or media coverage. If we look at **The O-Zone**, and kids programmes

such as **Live and Kicking** today, pale, wiry boys with guitars are still the preferred look.

Black-British musicians still rarely get onto the covers of the parochial music press (with the

justification by some editors that sales will drop), and the manufacturing of limited modalities

of Blackness is, in general terms, rife.[43] The current media frenzy over 'BritPop' (and BritLit

and BritArt), although declared 'British', is principally focused on White artists (Oasis, Blur,

Pulp etc). Although 'BritPop' is categorised by nation, Black-British musicians are generally

defined according to music styles such as r 'n b and soul.[44] Of course, that Tony Blair and

New Labour have been keen to 'rebrand' Britain in selected ways, does not mean that there

aren't more multicultural forms of popular culture around. More generally, popular culture

within mainstream television, is still defined as all that is left once the domain of high (or at

least middle-brow) culture has been dealt with. Beadle, Black and Barrymore are still

considered as British television's dominant popular cultural icons.

Secondly, Black people in popular culture (as in other areas such as sport), although regularly

seen performing, rarely occupy positions of authority or commentary. For example, whilst the music press and esteemed awards such as the annual Mercury Music prize have, in recent years, acknowledged Black-British talent (Finley Quaye, Shola Ama, Roni Size, Mark Morrison, for example), there is still a notable absence of Black commentators, writers and judges. The serious business of analysis and criticism is still predominantly a White preserve. Arts review shows such as **Big Mouth** (Channel 4, 1997), **Late Review** (BBC2), **Tx:**(BBC2, 1996) and **On Air** (BBC2, 1998), the most recent programmes to critically reflect on aspects of music, media and style, are almost all led by White male journalists who have been transported from print to television. It is also only recently that we have seen the rise of Black presenters on the few popular music shows to appear on British television, such as BBC2's **The O-Zone** (Rajesh Mirchandani), Carlton's **Videoteque** (Margherita Taylor), and **Top of The Pops** (with many Black guest presenters since its revived format in 1994, although the show now relies on mainly White regular BBC presenters). There is also the argument that, while Black personalities and stars are sometimes seen 'fronting' popular programmes, this can also be considered as a process of 'symbolic exclusion', concealing the more representative absence of Black people behind the scenes and on television in general (see Gilroy in Givanni, 1995:31).

Terry Jervis argues that television light entertainment still remains difficult to enter, not only for performers but programme-makers as well. He doubts that a programme such as the 1980s series, **Behind The Beat**, would get made today. In relation to Channel 4's Black music show, **Flava** (1996, 1997-8), he says, 'Black music to White people is not esoteric. They're the biggest buyers of Black music. I'm told that there's all White people producing it, so they don't feel it necessary to have Black people producing a Black music show. They feel that

they know' (Jervis, interview with Malik, 20.3.96). Suggestively promoted by Channel 4 as 'raw, undiluted and uncensored', **Flava** was (despite the Channel's multicultural remit) the first Black music offering on Channel 4 since **Soul Train** in the mid-1980s (*The Voice*, 18.6.96:28). The fundamental and inextricable matter of class also looms here, in relation to the dynamics between the selected (and selective) Black pop culture image-makers and the Black youth in whose name the programmes are sometimes made. The fact is that many of the defining Black-British styles and trends have working-class roots which are worlds apart from the dominant middle-class perspectives within broadcasting institutions.[45] But the fact that Black urban cultures are represented by those (Black and White) who might not have any links with them is almost inevitable, given the culture of production, management and access that governs television output.

The third point, is that Black performers have rarely enjoyed the sustained support of television necessary to make them into stars and when they do appear, heavily-coded racism still often exists. We have seen particular representational strategies at work in relation to gender. In terms of Black female entertainers, who have rarely been British, with the notable exception of Shirley Bassey, 'the girl from Tiger Bay',[46] the sexual element is routinely foregrounded. This is often constructed around the Black woman's supposed overt 'animality'. For example, America's top-selling r 'n b artist in the 1950s, Ruth Brown, was also known as 'Miss Rhythm'; during the 1980s, Tina Turner was promoted wearing an animal fur skirt with the caption 'Captured live...Tina Turner'; publicity shots of Grace Jones pictured her caged, on all fours (Steward and Garratt, 1984); and the Black Spice Girl (Mel B) is, of course, the one who wears leopard-skin and is better known as 'Scary Spice'. Although notions of female exotica and difference have changed, these have often depended on such

variables as the Black woman's skin tone and weight (the 'thigh-slapping, eye-rolling, laughing black mama', Steward & Garratt, 1984:49), her femininity (the flowing dark hair, bright sari, heavily made-up vision of Eastern exotic in Sheila Chandra, a rare Asian example) or indeed, her apparent manliness (the 'Warrior Woman' as epitomised by Carol Kenyon and Grace Jones' 'Zulu Warrior'). The point here, is not whether or not these women have been exploited, but that such associations predominate in the construction of the Black image - and that television, when it has presented these artists, is an integral part of that system of representation.

Despite the increased visibility now given to black performers and entertainers, the old associations between the Black body, sexuality, primitivism and Nature remain strong and persistent (see Chapters 4 and 7). Gilroy notes how Jimi Hendrix, an American who gained popularity in Britain and then America, typified 'the essential image of what English audiences felt a black American performer should be: wild, sexual, hedonistic, and dangerous' (Gilroy, 1993a:93). The 'authenticity' of Hendrix's 'true Blackness' (at least according to English audiences) was related to the way he expressed himself physically. Hendrix's adversary, Eric Clapton summed up the attraction like this:

> You know English people have a very big thing towards a spade. They really
> love that magic thing. They all fall for that kind of thing. Everybody and his
> brother in England still think that spades have big dicks. And Jimi came
> over and exploited that to the limit...and everybody fell for it. (Quoted in
> Gilroy, 1993a:93)

Former **Girlie Show** (Channel 4) presenter, Clare Gorham, described how she was asked to pose for the series' publicity shot with clenched teeth and clawed fingers and told "You look

great, you're going to look so strong" (quoted in *The Guardian*, 9.12.96:5). But she also notes

that being of mixed race was perhaps an advantage for her because "You're not dark enough to

offend people" (Gorham, cited from **In Quest**, Channel 4, Tx:9.9.97). Naomi Campbell, with

all her wealth and fame, is still often referred to as 'the Black panther'. The difference of

Blackness persists and traditional images of Black women as animalised and Black men as

violent and sexually rapacious are everywhere to be seen in popular imagery. One question

which arises here, as it did in relation to comedy, is to what extent these essentialist notions of

'Blackness' are used and played on by Black entertainers themselves, in order to attain or

sustain mainstream popularity? There is no doubt that some Black entertainers do trade on

stereotypes of Blackness for commercial gain. Can popular entertainment be *used to play back*

the stereotype (think of the Black-British soul-star, Mark Morrison, dubbed 'the baddest man

in British pop', or the madcap Ainsley Harriot), and thus produce something which is

'obviously' or 'typically Black'? Here we need to note which versions of the 'Black popular'

are expedient, selected and preferred by those image-makers who 'translate' them for British

television audiences.

c) CASE STUDY 2: Baadasss (Trash) TV

One of the most interesting but, I would argue, crude attempts to feature aspects of what it

classified as new Black popular culture, was **Baadasss TV** (Channel 4, 1995-96). By the time

of its broadcast, there remained very little in terms of considered youth television and in 1996,

the BBC relinquished the term 'Youth' from its Entertainment Features Department.[47] While

the concept of 'youth' moved on from simply being a symbolic form of resistance (Hall et al,

1976) to a major form of commodity (Osgerby in Briggs and Cobley, 1998:322-334), targeted

programmes were becoming less generationally-specific and much more packaged according to

different audiences' life-styles and mind-sets. Screened in a late-night Friday slot, **Baadasss**

TV attempted to reach a young, lost Black audience. It readily employed such obvious props

of 'hipness' as the notorious rapper presenter, Ice-T, clad in a Zoot suit, a 70s Blaxploitation

feel and 'flash-trash' set. Despite its spirited attempt at being 'light' where other Black

programmes had tended to be 'heavy', **Baadasss TV** amounted to little more than White

programme-makers telling Black people what they defined as 'cool'. The notion of a freakish

Black culture was deliciously revelled in *ad nauseum*. The first series, deliberately setting out

to shock and scandalize, was billed as a journey through 'some of the weird, wonderful,

irrelevant and sexy aspects of the Black experience. This is not a show for the politically

correct' (*The Voice*, 28.5.96:3). The series offered many cheap, 'novel' twists on 'Black

culture': a Black artist using elephant dropping for his paintings, dwarves rapping, porn stars

with outlandish body parts, and so on. A few editions were economically peppered with semi-

serious items, mostly on Black music forms. The first edition featured porn-star, Long Dong

Silver, and outed him as a fake, much to *Sun* reviewer, Gary Bushell's delight, who wrote,

'Let's pray Linford Christie's lunchbox is above suspicion' (Bushell, *The Guardian*, 7.4.95:8).

Indeed, many of the items dealt in popular myths around 'Blackness' and most related to its

subjects' physiques. This notion of prodding and playing with the bizarre aspects of Black

culture lay the text open to criticisms that it was, in fact, inviting people to revel, once again, in

Black people's supposed peculiarities. (We have already seen how ambiguity-ridden this

'playing on'/'playing off' conundrum operates in terms of comedy - of what and whether

'sending up' is actually an endorsement of.) By enclosing everything in inverted commas,

Baadasss TV attempted to make one, big, postmodern joke out of 'Black culture'.

Rarely for a Black programme, **Baadasss TV** received significant press attention. But it was

interesting to see that it was the populist Black newspaper, *The Voice,* which was most censorious of the programme and used its pages to access a debate about the series. *The Guardian* also profiled the series, describing Ice-T (on the eve of the first edition) as, 'Rapper, writer, ex-soldier, ex-jewellery thief, ex-house burglar, needlepoint enthusiast and now presenter of Channel 4's **Baadasss TV**' (*The Guardian,* 30.3.95:3). At the time, Trevor Phillips argued that **Baadasss TV** 'shows nothing but contempt for Black Britons' and is 'just another nigger minstrel show' (*The Guardian,* 7.4.95:8). Terry Jervis, who produced and directed the first series, surprisingly agreed, and alleged that the version of Black popular culture he liaised with Channel 4 and Rapido TV about, was very different from the end-product. He says, 'I personally could not stay on the show because I didn't agree with it. They didn't have another Black producer after me, so the only people pushing out those images were White males who thought that was popular hip Black culture, but it was only really their kind of fetishes' (Jervis, interview with Malik, 20.3.96). Although it could be argued that similar shows such as **Eurotrash** (another Channel 4 programme made by Rapido TV) and **The Word** also mocked aspects of 'White culture', it is also true that **Baadasss TV** was the only Black light entertainment show screened at the time, whereas comparable 'White' shows were screened alongside a whole host of other arts and music programmes (Phillips, *The Guardian,* 7.4.95:8). The surreptitious 'one Black show at a time' (if that) ruling inevitably placed an impossible burden of criticism on the series - but then it really did ask for it!

The economic coverage of the specificities of *Black-British cultures* seen on television to date, also called **Baadasss TV's** American bias into question. Although British produced, the programme was over-loaded with selected features and signifiers of Black American life, giving a distinctly imported feel. Of course, the programme-makers would not have found the same

stock of peep-show 'freaks' if they had limited themselves to Britain. **Baadasss** also marked a

general assumption, that it is African-American popular culture that is *the* 'hip' and 'trendy'

element of Black popular culture. Of course it shouldn't (or perhaps can't) be an either/or

situation, especially given the level and tradition of cultural exchange between the UK and the

US, but the opportunity to profile the distinctiveness of the Black-British context outside the

tragi-comic dual framework and to represent the complexities and pleasures of Black-British

popular cultures, was not taken up. By presuming global connections (i.e. that British Black

and Black American were one and the same), the series collapsed our local into their global. All

this managed to do was to obliquely reveal one of the biggest fallacies of the 'global

postmodern' (Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:466); that 'we are...all 'postmodern' in anything

like the same way' (Morley in Morley and Chen, 1996:332-3).

On an employment level, former Associate Producer David Akinsanya stresses how the

inequitable production structure around **Baadasss TV** highlighted the routine White editorial

control in Black television output. He explained:

> Baadasss had not one Black person above the level of associate producer.
> Young, inexperienced Black staff came up with the ideas, White executives
> and producers with little knowledge of Black culture decided what the story
> was, and a Black associate producer did the filming. The tape is then cut by
> White editors - thus the end product is far removed from the original idea and
> has removed from all Black editorial input. We all know that it is important
> to have editorial input as this can make a programme negative/positive,
> funny/offensive, honest/deceitful etc. (Akinsanya, *The Voice*, 28.5.96:10)

This recurring trend, for White programme-makers to produce so-called 'Black programmes',

whilst not necessarily invalidating the text, does signal something important about the

schematic arrangement of Black producers and programmes within British television. Peter

Stuart, **Baadasss TV's** executive producer (and Managing Director of Rapido TV), argued that,

'In all the shows here I make the decisions. I'm White. If you do not like it then do not work

here that is the tone and attitude of the company. I am not prepared to put a Black person

above me just to appease other people' (Stuart, *The Voice*, 28.5.96:3). Stuart's autocratic

attitude and contemptuousness, begs the question of how much we really can say that things

have changed since the early Channel 4 days, when the custodianship is still being given to

those who appear to have no familiarity with or understanding of Black-British cultures?

Imruh Bakari suggests that Channel 4 has now 'developed a group of White people who feel

they know Black people better than Black people and are, in fact, making money out of Black

programmes. There are no Black people making money out of Black programmes' (Bakari,

interview with Malik, 10.12.96).

Conclusion

This is a complex, rapidly shifting field, difficult to summarise in conclusion. The first point, is

that although cultural and political formations are something which happen within

representation, Black-British youth culture (as an example of the popular), is clearly

something which is not totally 'lived' (and in fact, very selectively seen) in the

representational form of television. It is more profoundly revealed through other public and

private spaces (the record store, the dance-floor, the designer market) and social realities. We

can see then, that the classic power structure around popular culture, of those 'from above'

(the industrial magnets) as the definers of culture and those 'from below' as passively

absorbing or performing it, has been challenged in distinctive ways by many young Black

Britons.[48] But the important point here, is that many young Black-British people today have

had no real connection to radical politics or to the struggles for access or dependency on one medium (e.g. television) for representation. They do not all see television as a key site of conflict, at the centre of their public sphere or as even being capable of answering their representational needs. Young Black Britons are therefore arguably establishing a different relationship with television, compared both to those Black people blatantly excluded from it in the 1950s and 1960s, and those who campaigned for more equality of representation in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, the story of involuntary Black absence which has pervaded the history of Black representation on British television at large, is clearly different in the field of popular culture, because it is here that young Black-British people have 're-made' themselves anew. Signifiers of 'Blackness' are currently everywhere to be seen and Black artists - not always for liberatory reasons - make their own visible impression on the way British culture is lived. This is not to say that the same structures of access, dominance and economic inequity do not exist here, but that they, at least superficially, appear to have been weakening rapidly in recent years.

The second point, is that while I have agreed with Angela McRobbie's assertion that, 'there is no clear divide between 'lived experience' and 'texts and representational forms'' and that, 'the one is always merging with the other' (McRobbie in Chambers and Curti, 1996:43), I would also suggest that the representational form of television has, throughout its history, largely failed to volunteer itself as a space of identification for Britain's Black youth.[49] In terms of British television, we therefore need to ask why it still defers a significant acknowledgement of Black-British popular cultural forms' impact on negotiating boundaries such as race, gender, and class. If we gauge 'the Black popular' in terms of its impact on fashion, style and music, then it is huge; if we consider its effects on other working cultural patterns (language, social

trends) then it is even more profound. But if we measure how it is defined in the context of popular television, then its presence has clearly been either unrecognised, weak or downgraded.

The active role of the TV institutions themselves in managing and mediating what 'Black popular culture' has come to mean also needs to be understood. It is what Fiske calls 'of the people' (Fiske, 1989) but also administered by programme-makers' tastes. This might go some way to explaining why it is frequently only the most sexy and outlandish views and images of Black cultures which are brought to screen. The violent, gun-carrying, gangsta-rapper from the ghetto is assumed to be far more spectacular - and representative - than the anti-violent undertones of a film such as **We The Ragamuffin** (Dir: Julian Henriques, Channel 4, Tx:7.9.92) (see 'The harder they come', *The Independent*, 17.7.92:17). The image of 'well-adjusted' British-Asians dancing to dub and 'trip-hop', or a detailed analysis of the complex moves and shifts around Black cultural expression are very rarely seen. There are some exceptions here such as Isaac Julien's **The Darker Side of Black (Arena, BBC2, Tx:12.2.94)** and BBC2's **Soul Night** (Tx:29.8.98) which was a lively and comprehensive celebration of Black soul music and the mainstream adoption of Black style. Presented by Radio 1 DJ Lisa I'Anson and Soul II Soul's Jazzie B, **Soul Night** provided historical insight, archive footage, live performance and critical analysis. In general though, such critical detail is presumed to be less arresting than the shaved-heads, black-shades and gangsta-hooded figures we are more used to seeing.

While this discriminating investment in, cloning and commodification of, Black artistry and style is just one thread of this history, it does need to be recognised. From Elvis to Madonna, we have seen 'black culture [deployed] as yet another sign of their radical chic' (hooks,

1992:157; my addition). Black people have been resisted, appropriated and embraced in different moments of this history. In the 1980s, it was style through charity, with 'events' such as Band Aid (featuring hardly any Black-British acts). For the English middle classes today, Asian, African and Caribbean style comes in the form of 'ethnic' home furnishings,[50]going for a balti or curry, and taking a holiday in post-apartheid South Africa. Salwar Kamiz are now deemed trendy because they were modelled by Jemima Khan and the late Princess Diana. The Indian dress which was once (and still is - depending on who is wearing it) an ethnic signifier of the non-Western, the oppressed and the unpretentious, is now held up as a marker of style (note Red or Dead's 1997 Collection). 'Going back to nature' and spiritualism is acquired by body piercing, dreads and 'herbal' Henna body tattoos (Grant, *The Guardian*, 15.4.97:8) The styles themselves might not change, but society's cultural definitions of them do. They are often simultaneously used to denote both the primitive and the modern and these fluctuating definitions of the 'popular' can coexist. For what it's worth, loving Black style in the form of the new exotica can also function to rebuke racism. In cynical terms, the appropriation of Black style (clothing and music for example) can obscure the identification with racist thinking. The "I can't be a racist because I get on with the Paki next door" has now been replaced with "I can't be racist because I love Indian food, listen to rap, or fancy Ruud Gullit". However, it is also true that young White people, as McRobbie suggests, can "disidentify with racism' through strongly identifying with aspects of black culture. Music, fashion and style thus make available a symbolic language of popular anti-racism' (McRobbie in Chambers and Curti, 1996:43). In looking at the force of style in shaping political and cultural ideologies, we must also ask whether we can build anti-racist strategies around the arena of popular culture or accept it as an essentially shallow space.

NOTES

[1] This reference is taken from Morley and Chen's collection of Hall's work (1996), although the paper, 'What is this 'black' in black popular culture?' was originally published in Wallace and Dent, 1992, 21-36.

[2] There has been a fair amount written on Black musical stars of the forties and fifties (Stuart, Bourne, Dyer, Bogle) and more recently on Black-British popular cultural forms (McRobbie, 1996, Gilroy, 1993a, 1993b), although the latter remains an undeveloped field in specific relation to television. Accounts of the history of Black representation on British television have tended to focus on drama, comedy and film (Barry, 1988, Daniels & Gerson, 1989).

[3] I have taken the term 'lived culture' from Tony Bennett,1986, xii.

[4] The 'science of race' and biologically essentialist notions of 'Blackness' will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter on sport.

[5] For more on the radio variety tradition of the 1920s and 1930s, see Scannell and Cardiff in Waites et al, 1982,178-185.

[6] It is interesting to note that many early Black performers in Britain were very highly regarded and often performed for royalty. For example, the 'In Dahoney' cast performed for King Edward VII at Buckingham Palace. For a detailed account, see Jeffrey P. Green 'High Society and Black Entertainers in the 1920s and 1930s' New Community, 13 (3), Spring 1987.

[7] Fryer (1984; Appendix H:440-444) traces back the presence of Afro-American (often visiting) performers in Britain to the late C19. He cites the example of the Fisk Jubilee Singers who toured Britain in 1873 and introduced various musical influences and songs to British people.

[8] Variety In Sepia, unearthed by the BBC Archive in 1990, is the earliest known tele-recording.

[9] Welch's talent was later recognised on This Is Your Life (1985) and Channel 4 documentary Keeping Love Alive (1987) and in 1988 she received a special Variety Club Award for 'Services to Entertainment'.

[10] A notable television variety slot for Baker was Cafe Continental (BBC, 1947-53), a forty-five minute cabaret show which on 29.6.48, featured the Folies Bergeres star and her band-leader husband Jo Bouillon.

[11] 'Black Diva' is a term taken from the title of a Channel 4 programme made by Cultural Partnerships and directed by Dominique Harrie, Tx:1.9.96. Modern versions of the 'Black diva' image can be seen in Diana Ross, Whitney Houston and in many 'R & B' and soul songstresses (Alaiyah, Mary J.Blige).

[12] A detailed analysis of the star machinery around Robeson and the critical and popular responses to him, can be found in Dyer,1987, 67-139 and Bourne, 1998, 13-42.

[13] In response to Robeson's character Bosambo in Sanders of the River (1935) (ITV, Tx:16.1.57, Channel 4, Tx:29.7.93, 1995, 1997), there were a number of complaints by Nigerians that the portrayal of Nigeria was insulting and outdated, and that the film had been screened on British television. Matthew T. Mbu (then Commissioner for Nigeria) was quoted in The Manchester Guardian (22.11.57) as saying that Sanders was,"the most damaging film ever shown on television".

[14] Edric Connor appeared with Evelyn Dove in the popular weekly radio and then television music series Serenade In Sepia (BBC, Tx:18.7.46-28.4.47). He also appeared on Music Makers (BBC, Tx:22.6.46) and in a number of drama productions (see Edric Connor, interview with Marjorie Bilbow The Stage, 25.6.64, and Chapter 8). In 1972, Pearl Connor was awarded the Humming Bird Silver Medal for 'outstanding service to the immigrant community in the United Kingdom' by the government of Trinidad and Tobago. It was not until 1992 that she received the National Black Women's Achievement Award in Britain.

[15] In 1977, Cleo Laine and her husband, John Dankworth, were named 'Showbusiness Personality of the Year' by the Variety Club.

[16] But 'blackface' had been a popular form of (mostly stage) British entertainment since around 1833 in Britain. In 1866, the Sam Hague's Georgia Minstrel Troupe toured Britain and in 1881, the Haverly's Coloured Minstrels performed at Her Majesty's Theatre. English people also imitated Black performance, as in the case of the 'cake-walk' in the early C20. (See Harry Reynolds,1928, Minstrel Memories: The Story of Burnt Cork Minstrelsy in Great Britain from 1836 to 1927, Alston Rivers LTD.)The Minstrel tradition remains strong today, mostly in seaside-town tours and has its own magazine Minstrel Stars.

[17] There were various attempts at introducing colour television during the 1960s, but it was officially launched on 2.12.67.

[18] Potter on being reminded of what he had written in the 1960s, responded to Woffinden's *Listener* article by saying, 'I went a very strange colour...Even the smart-arse irony in one of the sentences is enough to make anyone queasy. I feel ashamed' (*The Listener*, 28.7.88).

[19] Cohen uses this term to specifically discuss media representations of mods and rockers in the 1960s.

[20] Rock and Roll represented the 'integration of commercial music' following significant changes in the structure of American race relations during the 1950s, one effect of which was to allow greater exposure to and interaction between 'Black' and 'White' music forms (Perry in Frith, 1988:65). As rock and roll became more respectable, counter youth cultural forms began to emerge such as psychedelia, hippies and rock and later on, the soul, ska, disco and the mod scenes.

[21] Perry complicates the story that Whites simply appropriated Black music forms, by suggesting that inter-racial influence and integration was a defining feature of early rock 'n' roll, although he also notes inequities in ownership, acclaim and financial rewards between Black and White artistes (Perry in Frith, 1988:51-87).

[22] This distinction between 'the good White' and 'bad Black' and rock 'n' roll as a threat to that hierarchy was explicitly articulated by many White supremacists at the time. The Executive Secretary of the Alabama White Citizen's Council stated, "The obscenity and vulgarity of the rock 'n' roll music is obviously a means by which the white man and his children can be driven to the level with the nigger...It is obviously negro music" (quoted in Perry in Frith, 1988:69-70).

[23] See Iain Chambers,1986, on how youth styles were apparent before 1945,151-180.

[24] In the US, Nat King Cole hosted his own show on NBC (1956-57) but the programme was boycotted by some channels and failed to get a national sponsor. In 1966, Sammy Davis, Jr., became the first Black performer to host a network variety show (see McCourt & Zuberi in Newcomb, 1997, 1107-115).

[25] In his film, **Big George Is Dead** (1986), Martin paid tribute to those West Indians who were part of this Soho scene in the 1960s.

[26] Television brought some strkiing images of clashes between the police and Black youth during the 1976 Carnival. To this day, the Notting Hill Carnival carries a dual image of pleasure/danger. On the first day of the 1997 Notting Hill Carnival, Sky News reported on how the carnival was 'increasingly becoming a safe event...with a history of violence' and Channel One got its crime correspondent to cover the carnival (Tx:24.8.97). In recent years, BBC2 has presented a special programme, **Notting Hill Carnival** (Tx:2.9.98) and ITV broadcast **Carnival '98** (Tx:31.8.98). Carnival was the subject of Sankofa's **Territories** (1984).

[27] For example, the Soul II Soul sound-system/production base began to develop in the late-1970s.

[28] The British soul scene, the impact of Black American music and emerging popular British counter cultures are the focus of Julien's **Young Soul Rebels** (1991), which was targeted in particular to a young Black-British audience.

[29] Despite being offered a five-album deal contract, Johnson set up his own company - 'the price you pay for keeping control'. He says, 'they wanted to make me into a big star, but I wasn't playing ball. I didn't want to be in debt to a record company' (*The Guardian*, 24.9.96:13).

[30] Compare the White look, content and feel of the first edition of leading style magazine, *The Face* in May 1980 with today's editions loaded with signifiers of 'urban Blackness'.

[31] Although the original concept for Yo! came from Sophie Bramley in Europe, MTV Europe decided to drop the European version of the show in favour of the US one in 1990. This prompted criticism about the lack of support for and exposure of European rap (see Sturmer in Dowmunt, 1993:62-65). The politics around the sought after MTV play-list continue today and in Britain at least, many young people only get to see what they want by tuning in to Cable's video jukebox channel **The Box** and paying 50 pence for the video of *their* choice.

[32] For example, new notions of young identity and hybridity have been explored in the recent work of Black film and programme-makers such as **I'm British But** (Dir: Gurinder Chadha, 1989), **Young Soul Rebels** (Dir: Isaac Julien, 1991), **We The Ragamuffin** (Dir: Julian Henriques, Channel 4, Tx:7.9.92) and **The New Eastenders** (Dir: Ruhul Amin, BBC2, Tx:19.12.96).

[33] These figures are regularly seen on television. For example, Shami Ahmed presented a Channel 4 series, **Dosh** (1996), Oswald Boateng presented **Roots, Toots And Suits** as part of BBC2's **Soul Night** (Tx:29.8.98) and Tricky (along with Salman Rushdie and others) is part of the BBC's promotion campaign for digital television (1998).

[34] For a discussion of the authenticity of these hybrid cultural forms, see Gilroy,1993a, 72-110, and Perry in Frith,1988, on the politics of anti/crossover music

[35] Kula Shaker also topped the bill (along with Ravi Shankar) of a televised music conference to mark the fiftieth anniversary of India and Pakistan's independence (**Fifty Years On**, BBC2. Tx:14.8.97).

[36] The interest in Black artists and music forms from outside of Britain has been an important feature of work produced by Black artists in Britain (for example, Faris Kermani's **Qawali: The Sabri Brothers** (1986), Albert Bailey's **Shadow: The Bass Man** (1985) and Pervaiz Khan's **Utterance - The Music of Fateh Ali Khan** (1990).

[37] Jameson 'Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' *New Left Review*, Vol 146, Jul/Aug 1984.

[38] See Gilroy for his discussion of 'antiphony' or call and response, 1993a, 72-110.

[39] Academic and political Afrocentric rhetoric has, perhaps ironically, been popularised through the Hip-Hop culture which began to emerge in the late-1980s. However, for some, the 'new black aesthetic' of gangsta rap and its spin-offs movies such as **Boyz in the Hood** and **New Jack City** are limited in their conceptualisation of 'Blackness' and according to Isaac Julien, 'not dialogic enough to think through the "hybridity of ethnicity"'(Julien in Wallace and Dent, 1992, 258).

[40] I am grateful to Stuart Hall for clarifying these two positions for me and pointing me to Gilroy's distinction and critique of them.

[41] An interesting dialogue emerged on the eve of the launch of Black style magazine *True* when the editors criticised leading style titles such as *The Face* for jumping on the 'Black is hip' bandwagon. In an article entitled 'This Face just doesn't fit', they pleaded for the then editor Sheryl Garrett to 'Just leave it alone' - the 'it' being Black popular culture (*The Guardian*, 3.7.95:14). Ekow Eshun (now editor of men's monthly *Arena*, previously worked on *The Face*, and has been making regular appearances as a guest critic on BBC2's **Late Review** since November 1997.

[42] The impact of this on performance, authenticity and Black music production has been considered in detail by Gilroy, 1993b:1-15.

[43] This is not just a problem in Britain or only in music. In August 1997, there was a battle between *TV Guide* (the US *Radio Times*) and **ER** because the show's leading Black star, Eriq La Selle was the only actor in the show not to have been put on the magazine's cover.

[44] There are a few exceptions such as Skunk Anansie and bands such as Echobelly who's lead singer Sonia Arora-Maden is Asian. It is interesting to note that 1998 saw Britain's first Black (half Sri Lankan, half Jamaican) Eurovision Song Contest contender, Imaani (who came second). The show also featured a multicultural music routine which included Welsh, Scottish and Indian (bhangra) artists.

[45] Mike Phillips has argued that class distinctions between Black communities have often functioned to weaken the political bond amongst Black people who are otherwise joined by patterns of immigration and settlement, so that 'blacks were required to signal radicalism by isolating themselves from and attacking the achievements of other blacks' (Phillips in Givanni, 1995:70).

[46] Bassey was named 'Show Business Personality of the Year' by the Variety Club in 1994.

[47] Today, soaps, populist documentaries, arts reviews, life-style based series and celeb-fronted game shows rather than those based directly on music, fashion and style are the ones packaged as terrestrial youth programmes. This is largely the result of commercial pressures given that targeted 16-24 slots rarely attract more than two million viewers. According to BARB figures, the overall average hours spent watching television by young audiences has, since 1992, slowly declined on all channels, except Channel 4 (*The Sunday Times*, 5.2.95). Graham Hall of Informer suggests that programmes such as **Coronation Street** and **Brookside** are much closer to young people's "tone of voice' and interests than anything served up by the ultra-hip **Def II**" (*The Sunday Times*, 5.2.95).

[48] The conventional story of commodification as a process which always ends with one-way exploitation, has been re-read by Dyer in relation to the star system when he notes, 'Stars are involved in making themselves into commodities; they are both labour and the thing that labour produces' (Dyer, 1987, 5).

[49] The TVYP session at the 1997 Edinburgh Festival asked the question of why more youth are turning off their sets.

[50] The current trend is for saris and North Indian textiles to be used as curtains and wall hangings, as seen on **Changing Rooms** (BBC2, Tx:4.8.97) and **Value For Money** (BBC1, Tx:21.8.97).

Chapter Seven

Black Masculinity, 'Britishness' and the Body in the Context of Television Sport

To represent people is to represent bodies. (Dyer, 1997:14)

Like many of the other genres I have looked at (comedy, variety, news), sport on television

represents itself as neutral and reflective. Sport is packaged, in the cultural terrain, as apolitical,

meritocratic and essentially about leisure and pleasure. It supports the Western democratic

ethos of 'equal opportunity', where 'anything can be achieved if you're good enough'. At the

same time, the premise of the sports game is based on competition, power and control. By not

considering the complex processes behind televised sport, we encourage the notion that sport

is a natural habitat for everyone, including Black people, and that images of it are essentially

free (whereas, as we argued earlier, naturalization is central to the process of fixing racial

difference). We would also overlook how Black people's success in the arena is perceived, and

how this might affect the ways in which 'Blackness' itself is represented and understood in

broader contexts. Sport clarifies the roles different races and nations have come to play in

modern representational forms.

Sport on television brings the contradictory and ambivalent relations of Black representation to

the fore: the popular, dominant televisual image of chaotic Black social life appears to be

challenged in representations of sport, where Black physical prowess is everywhere to be

seen. But how, and in what ways, are we invited to interpret the difference between the

visibility/treatment of Blacks in the 'mind' genres (documentary, drama, news) compared to

the 'body' ones (light entertainment, sport)? What is being spoken about 'race' through these representations? Does the image of the Black sports-player simply represent a 'positive stereotype', or can it be considered as 'negative' because it is rooted in essentialist notions of the Black body? Here we have to consider both the social and biological constructions of race, since 'the body' is the focal point of sport. We also need to ask whether we can say that Black sports players are symbolically active or passive, the objects or subjects of television representation. Who mediates the look at the sporting body, why is the gaze licensed here and in which ways do we appear to be looking? As I argued in relation to comedy and variety, this is not always a clear-cut story of positive *or* negative, passivity/control *or* meritocracy/autonomy, but often cuts across some quite complex mechanisms.

In the first section of the chapter, I will outline the role of the sport genre on British television. In Section 2, I will raise some of the key debates which arise from sport, and focus in particular on questions of national identity, genetics and the social division of labour in sport. The issue of where and where not we tend to see Black sports-players and the politics around this, are quite complicated, so I have provided some additional notes on this in Appendix G. I will address the question of why Black masculinity dominates this analysis, and consider whether biological readings of Black masculinity are connected to the ways in which Black men have been socially and culturally represented. In Section 3, I will go on to look at some of the traditions of British sport on television and identify some key Black figures in its early history. Although it is difficult (for archival reasons) to provide any detailed textual analysis here, I think it is important to acknowledge the types of images early British audiences saw of Black sports-players. In the final section, I will attempt to bring together some of these ideas through the use of selected case studies of British sports players and the ways in which they

have been depicted in the media. What I am primarily concerned with in this discussion, is how and what 'sport as a media form...communicates to us about *culture as a whole*' (Blain and Boyle in Briggs and Cobley, 1998:365) and to what degree it has either extended or broken from the traditional frameworks of Black representation that I have so far argued exist. My focus in this chapter is clearly on African-Caribbean sportsmen. It is not the purpose of this chapter to critique the male bias of sporting structures, but to identify key motifs around which Black representation in sport has been based - and this has tended to be male-oriented.

Section 1: The Sport Genre on Television

Television has always invested highly in sport (in terms of ratings, hours and national interest), cementing its status as one of the great passions of this century.[1] However, in recent years, terrestrial television's reign over sporting rights has diminished. This is as a result of the intervention in and increased consumption of televised sport by the cable and satellite channels, which has, in turn, served to divide the television sports audience.[2] Hence, the area of sport is a key site of contestation between public and private, generalist and theme-based, terrestrial and pay-TV models. It is the main area in which niche, extra-terrestrial channels (with revenue through subscription and pay-per-view systems), have usually managed to outbid the public, free-to-air broadcasters. The financial interdependency between sport and television is a key facet of their relationship, since television relies on sport coverage for revenue, and sport attracts sponsorship through television exposure. At the same time, in essence, sport exists independently of television - unlike other television genres such as the soap opera or situation comedy.

Apart from these economic aspects, sport is deeply connected to history, nostalgia and the

national psychology. The historic value of sport was realised in television's embryonic years, to such a degree that (along with the Queen's Coronation in 1953) sporting events were among the rare programmes which were 'tele-recorded' and thus deemed worthy of preservation (see Introduction for more on early archival trends). Archival sports footage still remains a huge resource today and holds value as material which is likely to be used and re-used time and time again (see Houston, 1994:146-7). Sport has also become more TV-oriented over the years, with the preponderance of sporting figures visible, not only in their chosen sporting discipline, but also promoted as general media 'stars' with high profiles and bankable personalities. Sports celebrities are routinely seen on hybrid sports/light entertainment shows (**Gladiators** (ITV), **They Think It's All Over** (BBC1), **Fantasy Football** (BBC2), on chat-shows and quiz programmes, and as presenters on anything from children's TV to documentaries. Many of today's television presenters are Black sportsmen. Footballer, Ian Wright, has presented **Top of The Pops** and his own chat-show **Friday Night's All Wright**, (ITV, Tx:23.1.98, 8.5.98); athlete, Duaine L'ago presented his own teenage chat-show, **Duaine's World** (ITV, 1995); Jeremy Gusgott and John Fashanu have both presented **Gladiators**; and Kriss Akabusi presented the BBC's **Record Breakers** which, in 1998, became **Linford's Record Breakers** presented by Linford Christie. The prominence of sports stars in these largely youth-oriented programmes marks how sport has become an integral part of contemporary popular culture, an influence on subcultural style. Fashion, style and sport increasingly feed off each other, and sports programmes and personalities have a wide appeal. They do, as Baran puts it, offer, 'real heroes and villains, as opposed to the fictional characters of televised drama and comedy' (Baran in Newcomb, 1997:1556). But televised sport is associated with so much more than the sporting game itself. It not only relates to issues around Britain's emotional and cultural character, but also to national, gender and racial identities. This broader context and questions

of belonging and exclusion, which are so central to representations of racial difference, are

therefore pushed to the fore in an arena which is a principal carrier of notions such as loyalty,

community and national identity. We can, as such, speak in terms of a British sporting culture.

In this chapter, I want to draw together these various commercial and cultural aspects of sport.

I am especially concerned with the relationship between television and a wider British sporting

culture. Rather than addressing this through textual analysis alone, I am more interested in how

the general patterns in representing national and racial identities are constructed through

televised sport. I also want to focus on selected Black contemporary sporting figures to

consider how their media profiles have been shaped by television, and to demonstrate how

notions of racial difference have been central to representing Black people in sport. In order to

understand these various contexts, it is necessary to accept the intertextuality and

interdependency across various media forms (radio, TV, press) in producing this regime of

representing racial difference in relation to sport. It is inevitable then, that I will have to

consider the representational strategies of different sports media. Television, although an

integral part of British sporting culture, tends to work alongside, rather than against other

forms of sports media. It is, for example, often difficult to determine what we have come to

know about a sporting figure from television which we have not been told elsewhere. British

sporting culture depends on, and is produced by, multi-media.

Televised sport offers an interpretative, informative and entertainment role. The media does

not simply relay sporting events, but *makes* them 'events' by organising them around dramatic

structures which attract audience interest. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith says in his discussion of

television football, 'Even where one can talk legitimately about events, the television picture is

never exactly a reproduction of one: it is always, in some way or other, a *representation*

(Nowell-Smith, 1978/79). What we need to consider, is how and why professional sport as a

mode of commercial entertainment, is used to touch the nation and what this can tell us about

race, ethnicity and 'Black-Britishness'. Of course, as with all cultural forms, the nature of the

sport genre and the way in which it has been televisually managed, has altered over time. What

is clear, is that throughout this history, sport has shaped our 'common sense explanations' of

ourselves and the world in which we live, as well as raising questions about pleasure, the body,

the nation, excellence, sexuality, masculinity, femininity, race, and so on (Coakley, 1994:7).

Sports coverage, particularly in the British tabloid press, can also let negative ideologies around

race slip through virtually unnoticed. Take *The Sun's* headline 'Why Can Blacks Run Faster

Than Whites?...It's all in the genes say experts' (7.8.93) on the day following Linford

Christie's win in the 100 metres World Championship. This article had more to do with

Linford's 'race' than the race he won. My point at this introductory stage (I will expand on

debates around biology, race and sport later), is that sports journalism is not exempt from

reproducing or even creating racist ideology and might even function as a key site for its

production.

Section 2: Sport, Black Masculinity and National Identity

a) National Identity

> Nationalism and racism become so closely identified that to speak of the
> nation is to speak automatically in racially exclusive terms. Blackness and
> Englishness are constructed as incompatible, mutually exclusive identities.
> To speak of the British or English people is to speak of the *white* people.
> (Gilroy, 1993b:27-8).

Television sport, as a genre which binds race and nation together, can be seen as a primary

sphere where new forms of national identity and racism are articulated. Sport gets the national

fervour rising. But whilst it is related to contemporary debates around identity and citizenship,

it also remains stuck in the liberal rhetoric of the immediate post-war years; the logic of

'assimilation' and 'integration'. It is Lord Tebbit's notorious 'cricket test' ('People who are

cheering the country they came from rather than the country they came to are not integrated',

Tebbit, quoted in *The Guardian*, 4.7.95, from a statement made in 1990), which perhaps best

exemplifies such thinking. There is something very traditional about sport in its investment in

the notion of a single, hermetically-sealed national identity: the assumption that the members

of a team (be they players or fans), should never have split loyalties. And if they do, that the

value of their *esprit de corps* will necessarily be diluted, as will the fortitude with which they

might play the game. Sport calls for unmixed patriotism; pure passion for one country alone.

Of course, the irony - more today than at any other time - is that the ideology of pure

nationalism is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, given the internationalisation of sport,

the hybridised identities and the multi-ethnic make-up of British sports teams, players and

enthusiasts. Despite this, intense outpourings of national pride continue to thrive and are often

based around sport and those connected with it. We witnessed this during Euro '96, but also

with the uglier side of blatantly racist attacks by the extreme-Right targeted at many high-

profile sports personalities in inter-racial couples such as Frank Bruno, Sharron Davies, Paul

Ince (in 1995, Ince became the first Black footballer to captain the England team).

One of the most interesting sporting televisual moments in the context of this discussion about

national identity, was when those watching the 1996 cricket Test Match between England and

India at Lords (many of whom were Asian), were filmed cheering when news broke that the

England football team had beaten Spain, which meant they were through to the Euro '96 semi-finals (BBC, Tx:22.6.96). Whilst many of these same jubilant British-Asians might have failed Norman Tebbit's 'cricket test', there is no doubt that the majority would have passed a comparative 'football test' with flying colours! An essentialist and unadulterated nationalism inevitably locates *some* members of the Black and Asian diaspora in an ambiguous position, for they are not always (nor want to be) one thing or another. Even if they are, the question of what exactly supporters are cheering for when they cheer for England or Pakistan is not necessarily a clear-cut one. Sport demands that we overlook the complexities of modern politics, as well as the realities of dramatic shifts such as global capitalism and wide-scale mass migration, which have encouraged the formation of tangled loyalties and multiple identities. This, however, is not something which *only* affects Black and Asian communities, although large sections of the media gear us towards believing that it is only the patriotism of Linford Christie, Devon Malcolm and John Barnes that needs to be called into question (while, the Zola Budds, Greg Rusedskis and Allan Lambs of modern sport are more or less embraced as 'authentic' British sporting heroes). Robert Henderson's supposition (in the cricket bible, *Wisden*) that, 'Black players for England won't play with the same fervour as White Englanders' proves that, for some, the 'Black' of the 'Black-British' will always be the defining factor. According to Henderson, 'A national side has to be a national side in fact as well as name. You can't have a multi-national nation. It's a contradiction in terms' (Henderson, 1995) (this brings to mind Enoch Powell's hypothesis that, 'Racism is the basis of national identity').

Thus, sport incorporates this pull between two apparently competing facets: a mononational nostalgic impulse trying to cope in the midst of developing, global, political economies. The

depthlessness of national sentiment is best revealed in the new models of commercial

nationalism which have emerged from a sports (particularly football) recruitment practice

which hires Black non-Brits to 'play for Britain' (such as the Surinamese-descended Ruud

Gullit who went on to become manager of Chelsea FC, a club with a strong racist element).

Many of Britain's 'great White hopes' are in fact, Black. The 'colour of money' has become the

overriding concern, and it is now simply impossible to ignore the wealth of Black sporting

talent. While sport might hold racial difference in place, national boundaries can necessarily be

and increasingly are cut across. The fact of 'Whiteness as a coalition' (Dyer, 1997:19), an

organising principle which allows itself to cut across White national differences so that

Americans, French, British etc., can co-exist, is inevitably unsettled by the dominance of

Blackness in sport.[3] (At this point I am reminded of the music video for Soul II Soul's song

'Represent Myself' (1997) which showed a clip of Linford Christie followed with the words

'When he won his Olympic gold was he British - or was he black?')

Racism itself is not intrinsically static and 'race' is not a fixed objective category. It is a messy

construct which slips between culture, nature, race and nation. 'Race', as I have suggested

elsewhere, is essentially a social construct. Physiological readings of race have attempted to

obscure the ideological dimensions of it. As Gilroy warns, 'When culture is brought into

contact with 'race' it is transformed into a pseudo-biological property of communal life'

(Gilroy, 1993b:24). It is this slippage which pushes xenophobia over into racism:

> When does a xenophobe become a racist? Speculation about "the national
>
> character" is often harmless, even self-mocking, but any idea that people
>
> necessarily possess characteristics because of where they come from, and that
>
> these are finally the most important thing about them, can slide into racism.

> Like racism xenophobia tends to be an unexamined bundle of prejudices - not
>
> a thought-out, consistent view.
>
> ('Xenophobia: past and present', *Education Guardian*, 11.6.96)

Clear displays of xenophobia have been seen in football, often referred to as 'the People's

game' or 'the game of the English'. Football has enjoyed a prominent role on British television

(largely because of its wide popularity and thus, high revenue potential), to such an extent that

the structure of the game itself has been altered to suit the needs of the medium (kick-off times,

length of half-time breaks, fixture lists etc made to fit scheduling imperatives).[4] In 1918, when

British troops returned from war and as leisure-time increased, sport (and particularly football)

came to represent national prestige, and the country's 'feel good factor' was often measured

according to its success in football. Farrukh Dhondy has said that if commissioning editors

were to give the public what they wanted from television, we would have 'wall-to-wall

football' (Dhondy, interview with Malik, 1.6.96)· Football has also seen some of the most

overt expressions of racism. Xenophobia was particularly rife during Euro' 96, not only on the

terraces, but in the British press, where tabloid values clearly infected broadsheet ones. The

'build-up' was a melange of anti-Europeanism and eager anticipation of what racial tension

might occur (discussed on **Crosstalk**, LWT/ITV, Tx:2.6.96). While there were obvious

supporters for the views expressed about foreigners during the game, many also abhorred the

way in which the British press (and most notably the Daily *Mirror's* headline

'Achtung!...Surrender', 24.6.96) rested on military metaphors and anti-Spanish ("paella

people') and anti-German sentiment (discussed on **Sport In Question**, ITV, Tx:24.6.96).

Piers Morgan (editor of the *Daily Mirror*), claimed that his paper's coverage of Euro '96 was

influenced by, and no more offensive than British war sitcoms such as **'Allo Allo and Dad's**

Army (Morgan, **BBC Nine O'Clock News**, 24.6.96). Simon Heffer, of the *Daily Mail* stated

that, "I don't think that there's any malicious intent in those headlines" (cited from

Newsnight, BBC2, Tx:24.6.96). Although renounced by many, jingoistic journalism still

managed to spill over into television commentary of the tournament (see Blain and Boyle in

Briggs and Cobley, 1998:365-376, on press coverage of Euro '96). What the majority of media

coverage of Euro '96 best revealed was that a very thin line exists between pride and prejudice,

fear and fervour.[5]

b) The Nature/Culture Debate - Born To Run?

The large-scale involvement and achievement of Black men in sport has given popular and

academic credence to biologically essentialist conceptions of race which suggest that Black

people are somehow better at sport because of their physical make-up. This logic has served

the dual function of both reintroducing conceptual hierarchies of humanity as well as

undermining the so-called meritocracy of sporting success. 'Scientific racism' entails attributing

certain characteristics (defined in terms of superiority or inferiority) according to a person's

race. The science of race only really began to develop in the eighteenth century and within the

context of anti-slavery movements (Pieterse, 1992:45). Traditionally, there have been many

forms of racial science such as polygenism, geographical determinism (developed around 1748

and based on climate and location), and other theories (such as those developed by Johann

Friedrich Blumenbach) based on the differences between Caucasians, Ethiopians and

Mongolians. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the popularity of eugenics was

part of a 'general ideological crisis' and was used as an explanation for Britain's economic and

social problems (Abrams, 1968:123). In Hitler's Germany, where sporting achievement was

central to the ethos of national pride, we can see that rather than letting 'his' Aryan people get

demoralised about their sporting defeats, Hitler rationalised Black people's sporting victory

through the ideology of Black physical difference. As Hart-Davis recounts:

> ...the phenomenal performance of the Blacks in Berlin worried many people
>
> besides the Fuhrer, and in the weeks that followed the Games gave rise to
>
> agitated controversy. Unnamed 'medical authorities' were quoted as saying
>
> that the emergence of the blacks had introduced a new factor into sport;
>
> coloured athletes were claimed to have abnormal muscular qualities, different
>
> from those of white men, and in particular an 'elongated heel' which gave
>
> them extra spring and therefore an unfair advantage. Because of this, it was
>
> suggested, future Olympiads would have to be split into two sections, one for
>
> Blacks and one for Whites. (Hart-Davis, 1986:230 quoted in Pieterse, 1992)

For some, the rudiments of race science continue to hold currency today. Recent years have

indeed seen the rise of genetics as a general explanation of social behaviour, IQ and bodily

structures.[6] Sport has often been used as the case in point in debates around genetics,

intelligence and race. As part of this growing phenomenon of genetic-based racial theories, Sir

Roger Bannister[7] recently stated:

> As a scientist rather than a sociologist, I am prepared to risk political
>
> incorrectness by drawing attention to the seemingly obvious but
>
> understressed fact that black sprinters, and black athletes in general, all seem
>
> to have natural anatomical advantages...It is perfectly obvious when you see
>
> an all-black sprint final that there must be something rather special about
>
> their anatomy or physiology which produces these outstanding successes, and
>
> indeed there may be - but we don't know quite what it is. (Bannister,
>
> speaking at the British Association Annual Festival of Science at Newcastle
>
> University, quoted in The Daily Mail, 14.9.95)

Bannister went on to suggest that these 'special' qualities might include a longer heel bone and

an adaption to warmer climates resulting in reduced fat or innate elasticity in Black people's

muscle fibres. The fundamental problem with the role that the 'science' of race plays in

society is not only the crude way in which it manifests itself in everyday 'common-sense'

explanations of racial hierarchies, but also its dependency on handy theories which nourish

common racist folklore.[8] Of course the idea that all Black people are homogeneous (the

premise of a lot of the research) assumes, for example, that there is such a thing as a single

type of Black African. This fails to recognise the wide diversity of cultural, physical and social

differences both within and between racially-defined groupings (which are in any case largely

unscientific). As Marek Kohn points out, 'Africa contains more human genetic diversity than

any other continent. An Ethiopian and a Nigerian may well be as different from each other

genetically as each is from a Norwegian (Kohn, *The Guardian*, 20.9.95:4). If we consider how

some of these debates touch on the area of sport and sports commentary, Black people are

generally regarded as though they are the only ones to posses a 'race'. Nobody, for example,

says that Scandinavians have a better *physical* ability for the foreground smash in tennis! Of

course, the paucity of images of Black golfers and commentators on television has more to do

with a lack of access (to the commentary box and the golf range), than with Black people's

inherent genetically-determined ineptness with those skills or sports.[9] For many years, there

was a popular myth that Black people could not swim, which made a Namibian man's

Olympic Swimming Gold medal especially difficult for many to account for. The success of

Kenyan long-distance runners and Valeri Borzov and Allan Wells Olympic athletic wins, have

also disproved the myth that Black people are unable to run long-distance, or that Whites are

unable to beat Blacks in certain sports. When a White person wins, it is usually viewed as

achievement, when a Black person wins, it is often attributed to their genes.

c) The Division of Sports Labour

The concept of sport as an opportunity for 'social mobility' (a psychology traditionally applied to working class males in general, but to working-class British African-Caribbean males in particular), carries with it the implicit assumption that sport is organised around principles of equity.[10] But as Grant Jarvie reminds us, sport functions on a number of very complicated levels:

> Sporting relations themselves are vivid expressions of privilege, oppression,
>
> domination and subordination. As such, there may be a strong element of
>
> voluntarism and freedom of choice in sport, but it is only within a range of
>
> negotiated and socially produced limits and pressures. (Jarvie, 1991:2)

In this sense, we can treat (television) sport as a club, with seemingly lax membership rules (if you're good enough, you're in) but which, once entered into, appears to judge harshly. Biological and social readings of racial difference have also affected the types of spaces (the 'division of labour') which are occupied by Black people in sport, which in turn, influences where we see them on television. There are, for example, many Black football players but very few Black commentators, coaches or managers; there are many young Asians playing football on a local, recreational level, but no Premiereship League Asian professional footballers; there are many Asian cricketers, very few Asian boxers, and so on. In general, the more traditionally working class and 'urban' the sport, the more likely that Blacks will be involved in them (football, boxing, skateboarding, street hockey), the more middle class and 'rural' (golf, show-jumping, tennis) is where fewer Blacks tend to be seen (see Appendix G).

Rather than seeing television as simply reflecting the reality of the ordered categories of the sporting world, the way in which perceptions of 'Whiteness', 'Asianness' and 'African-

Caribbeanness' are themselves created are central to the ways in which racial categories are

culturally represented and themselves reproduced. Racially-coded and body-based

interpretations of Blackness have, perhaps inevitably (since they are so much a part of the

way sport functions off-screen), helped to frame television sports coverage and commentary.

My basic claim, is that the ways in which Black sports-players have been represented on

television, are often part of a racist regime of representation. Television is part of the myth-

making machinery which devises racist stereotyping about the physical orientation of specific

racial groups because viewers have got used to seeing Blacks playing selective sporting roles

and this goes unquestioned. The African-Caribbean body in sport has come to represent all

that is not White or Asian. Blackness here, operates outside what Dyer has called 'the cultural

register of whiteness', which means that 'Black people can be reduced (in white culture) to

their bodies and thus to race, but white people are something else that is realised in and yet is

not reducible to the corporeal, or racial' (Dyer, 1997:14-15). Thus 'spirit' (the unseen) remains

a White preserve, whilst Blackness is something which is deeply grounded in the visual, unable

to transcend the body in which it is seen.[11] The Black body connotes lack of vulnerability,

little spirit, intellectual underachievement - and physical superiority, brawn and sporting

prowess. Dyer has argued that this trend is also evident in images of some White male bodies

which, when seen (Tarzan, colonial adventure movies, peplum heroes, action heroes of the

Stallone and Arnie kind), signify 'white men who are not at the top of the spirit pile, for whom

their body is their only capital' (Dyer, 1997:147).[12] Dyer also points out how the culture

(magazines, adverts, etc.) around particular sports such as body-building (which represents

leisure, wealth and aspiration), tends to focus on White men because these sports are

essentially about *achieving* an ideal body state, not about being *born* with one. Black destiny

meanwhile, has traditionally been viewed as already contained within the body, 'in the blood'

as it were (Poliakov, 1974:161). Whiteness is generally not looked on as a virtue in those

sports involving obvious use of the body (athletics, football), although it is widely presumed

to be beneficial in those which require more tactical manoeuvring (such as chess and golf).

Section 3: From Pawns To Players: The Early Politics of 'Blackness' in Sport

The political ideologies of sport in the context of race, can perhaps best be understood if we

remember how sport functioned to both distract and civilise colonial subjects. Sport operated

as a maxim for those assumed (by the colonisers) to need a civilising influence; to order the

disordered. Chris Searle has described Lord Harris's (ex-captain of the England cricket team

and ex-governor of Bombay (1890-95)), prescription of cricket during the days of Empire as,

> ...at the centre of the imperial ideal. It represented a new way of life and set of
>
> mores which he saw as necessary to impose on the 'chaos' of India and
>
> places un-English, an approach to social organisation that combined civilised
>
> 'manliness' with teamwork and a binding respect for the hierarchy of the rule-
>
> book. Cricket was an essential and symbolic part of imperial order and
>
> manners. (Searle, 1990:31)

Not only could those from the Caribbean, Pakistan and India be provided with a recreational

pastime on which to focus, but the sporting etiquette of games such as cricket could act as a

means by which the colonised could be taught how to follow the rules and regulations which

form the basis of most sports. But as C.L.R. James[13] has argued, the colonised were not

simply passive recipients of this process, but accepted and learnt 'the rules' strategically in

order to master them.[14] In Beyond A Boundary (1963), James argued that whilst the colonised

did learn the rules of the game, they also turned their success in mastering the sport on to the

colonisers. They used cricket strategically, in order to discipline and empower themselves

under the circumstances by which they were apparently being controlled.

Within this context, the West Indies' defeat of England (in England) in the 1950 Test Match marked for the first time, and in more ways than one, the end of Britain's colonial dominance. Indeed, clashes between England and the West Indies have been a constant feature of sporting history.[15] Winning was seen as an anti-imperial gesture. Since then, we have seen how the colonial tradition of the master/slave balance of sporting power and control has been transformed in modern, spectacular ways.[16] It has even been noted how the style of cricket (sometimes referred to as 'the gentleman's game') has, in recent years, witnessed an increasing 'creolization', with British and other White teams picking up on non-British techniques (Jarvie, 1991). There have, as a result, been attempts to maintain the quintessential 'Englishness' of the game (for example, in 1987, drums and musical instruments were banned by the cricket authorities; See Parry and Parry in Jarvie, 1991:157). Horace Ove, who used cricket as a metaphor in his film **Playing Away** (UK, 1986) argues that, 'Cricket is not just a game for West Indian people, it's a battle for respect; the understanding that I'm as good as you even at your best' (Ove, *Black Film Bulletin*, Summer 1996:18).

The BBC series **Will To Win** (BBC2, 1st Tx:20.9.93) outlined how the link between sport, politics and wider society is inextricable. It traced the political dimension of sport back to the nineteenth century. During the years of American apartheid, Blacks were regularly banned from certain events (for example, many cyclists, jockeys and baseball-players were banned in the 1880s).[17] Even when sport did become more integrated, the competitive racial element was often exploited by the 'drama' of Blacks and Whites being posited against each other. Supposed Black physical power was often indicated by racial catchphrases. For example, in

the 1930s and 1940s, heavyweight American boxer Joe Louis, was often referred to as 'The

Dark Destroyer' or 'The Brown Bomber' and footballer Albert Johanssen was referred to by

his Leeds UTD colleagues and fans as 'The Black Flash'. Thus 'Blackness' was often

associated with the physical dimension (which linked to their manual roles during slavery), and

with being 'superhuman' (i.e. more-than/less-than human).[18] Thus, following Joe Louis' win

against Primo Carnera in 1935, US news stated, 'Something sly and sinister and perhaps not

quite human came out of the African jungle last night to strike down and utterly demolish...'

(quoted in Mead, 1985). In a similar way to the early television variety tradition, the most

prominent Black figures that British television viewers were likely to see in television's

embryonic years, were American - although there were, in fact, a number of Black sports

players in Britain.[19] The 'good nature', 'dignity' and 'humility' of Black sportsmen was

sometimes commented upon - as if these were exceptional 'Black' traits.[20]

So we can see that, even at this early stage, sport was a symbolically-charged zone.

One of the most significant early Black sporting figures in demonstrating this was Jesse

Owens, who was a thorn in the side of Hitler's Aryan myth when he won four gold medals in

the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Owens represented an iconic moment, "a symbol of the free world

against fascism" (Will To Win, Tx:29.3.93). Joe Louis, who held the World Heavyweight

champion title between 1937 and 1949, was another.[21] Louis, when posited against the Aryan

idyll, Max Schmeling (19.6.36), was both a source of pride (when winning) and severe

humiliation (in defeat). Thousands listened on the radio or saw the fights on television. Louis,

on his meeting with Roosevelt prior to another battle with Schmeling (22.6.38) was told,

"these are the muscles that are going to defeat Nazism in this world, so don't let me down".

By the 1960s, many Black men began to realise the political significance and power of their sporting roles. Tommie Smith recalls how in his world record 200m run at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, "I was running for something greater than a world record or running fast. I was running for dignity, for equality, for prosperity, for pay back..." (Smith, cited from **Will To Win**). 1968 was one of the most significant years in terms of televised sport and Black representation; it was the year when the world saw Tommie Smith and John Carlos making the 'Black Panther gesture' on the Olympic rostrum. Both were subsequently ostracised by US athletic establishments. The late 1960s represented a shift from earlier Black participation in sport by 'pawns' (the ever compliant Joe Louis and Jesse Owens), to the more assertive, active and politicised awareness of new Black sporting players. Many now began to use their high sporting profiles to renounce discrimination within established sporting structures.

Muhammad Ali (previously Cassius Clay, which he described as his "slave name"), was the perfect embodiment of the new politically militant generation of Black sporting heroes. As I mentioned in Chapter 6, there was, in the late 1960s, great interest amongst many Black people in Britain in the various (mostly American) Black popular music, political and sports icons. Ali was a visible and global symbol of Black activism. He threw away the medal he won at the boxing final in the Rome Olympics (1960) after being refused service in a racially-segregated restaurant; he refused to get drafted into the US army (for which he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment); and he was explicit in his criticism of racism in the United States (Hoch, 1974:383). Ali was highly televisual - giving good soundbite ("I am the greatest") and dramatic stares with determined and direct address at the camera. One of the most iconic modern sporting moments was the image (brought to millions via television) of Ali standing over a defeated Sonny Liston, fist cocked shouting "Get up and fight sucker"(1965). Ali had

intrinsic dramatic value and this was aided by the sport which he mastered. What stood out, was how skilful *he* was at *using* the camera to transmit a particular image and politics. Furthermore, he displayed a shrewd knowledge of how he was publicly perceived. On contending for the world heavyweight against Sonny Liston, he said, "Well 100% will be coming to see me, but 99% will be coming to see me get beat, because they think I talk too much". In this statement alone, Ali not only registered his power as personality, as character, as icon, but also his awareness that he was not necessarily 'lovable' because he was a star (see 'On Muhammad Ali', *Race Today*, April 1971). His visit to Africa (which he referred to as 'home'), his alignment with Black Muslims, and his sporting prowess made him one of the greatest (Black) sporting icons of the twentieth century. This was marked at the opening ceremony of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, and BBC2 celebrated Ali's brilliant career in **Ali Night** Tx:24.5.98, a sequence of programmes based on the boxing hero's life.

Section 4: Black Sports Performers/Personalities on Television

Some academics have argued that considerations of 'the psychic complexity of Blackness' (McRobbie in Chambers and Curti, 1996) are essential in comprehending ethnicity (Hall, 1992, Bhabha, 1990). Sport is clearly 'real' and rooted in everyday experience but is also dependent on the way certain bodies are constructed in fantasy (see Chapter 6 on 'lived' cultures). Watching sport is necessarily a voyeuristic act with ingrained dramatic value. Sport (and visual representations of it) draws our attention to the bodies of performers. In her discussion of youth subcultural forms, Angela McRobbie argues that:

> The sociological line separating lived experience from representational forms
> is definitely broken in the space of fantasy, in the state of distraction, in the
> daydream, as the eye flickers across the advertising billboards. In this
> important context, fascination and desire acquire a particular force, a peculiar

intensity. We cannot ignore the strength of these privatised (but also social)

experiences. (McRobbie in Chambers and Curti, 1996:43)

Sport is a classic case study which reveals the contradictions around sameness and difference,

envy and loathing which are central to representations of Black masculinity in cultural

representation. Kobena Mercer has said:

As a major public arena, sport is a key site of white male ambivalence, fear

and fantasy. The spectacle of black bodies triumphant in rituals of masculine

competition reinforces the fixed idea that black men are "all brawn and no

brains," and yet because the white man is beaten at his own game -- football,

boxing, cricket, athletics -- the Other is idolized to the point of envy.

(Mercer, 1994:178)

The Black body can function as the agent of the other's fascination and desire, perhaps

desirable because fascinating. And fear often accompanies desire. But can we, as bell hooks

argues, simply conclude that the Black male's body (and the Western Imaginary's perception

of it) is the 'agent of his victimization'? (hooks, 1992:103.)

a) Looking at the Black Body

Just as it is largely seen as the preserve of White academics and journalists to engage in cultural

criticism (despite the huge grip of Black-led styles on popular culture), so Blacks, although

highly visible as sporting performers, are rarely seen on television as sporting commentators.

This gap between performance (both in sport and variety) and critical reflection is huge. The

Black performer/athlete connotes, in Laura Mulvey's terms, 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey,

1975:214), but is very rarely allowed, at least in a professional capacity, *to look.* (Of course,

there are a number of recent exceptions who have 'crossed over' into the role of observation, such as Ian Wright, John Barnes, Garth Crooks and Ruud Gullit.) There is something very central to sport which relates to *looking*. Mulvey, in her development of Freudian psychoanalysis, has argued that women are positioned as the image (the passive object to be looked at), and men as the bearers of the look (the active eye), and that the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. But Mulvey overlooks the differences *within* gendered categories and, to this extent, neglects the fact that looking relations, as well as being dependent on gender, are also racially constructed. As such, it is not only women who can be 'the image' or who can be coded as visual spectacle. It would logically follow then, that not all Black men are 'active'. Like gay people, Black men can be passively looked at; the mode of looking can, as such, be feminised (see Mercer 'Reading Racial Fetishism' in Mercer, 1994:173-85, Hall, 1997:223-290, Nixon in Hall, 1997:291-336).

The processes of 'fixity', containment *and* ambivalence, appear to be at work in representations of Black masculinity in sport. In the sporting context, the picturing of Black men can move away from the dominant systems of imaging men and women in culture - a system which otherwise depends on the dichotomies of active/passive, masculine/feminine, desire/narcissism. In sport, which depends on actively looking and being looked at, we have (physically) active and (iconically) powerful men who necessarily display their bodies for mass media consumption. Like the subjects of pornography,[22] they can certainly be objectified and placed under a (sometimes) voyeuristic gaze which are impelled by impulses such as envy, fear and desire (see Stern, 1982, on desire). Mercer and Julien have said in relation to Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of the Black nude:

> Mapplethorpe appropriates elements of commonplace racial stereotypes to
> prop-up, regulate, organise and *fix* the aesthetic reduction of the black man's

flesh to a visual surface charged and burdened with the task of servicing a

white male desire to look - more importantly, assert - mastery and power

over the looked-at. (Mercer and Julien, 1988:145)

The dominance of the 'looked-at' state can produce some complex fantasy and looking

relations when it comes to representations of Black men. If the gratification of desire comes

from the act of desiring itself, then television has played an active part in focusing on Black

men and aspects of their bodies as an invitation to the scopophilic gaze (Freud uses the term

'scopophilia' to refer to 'pleasure in looking', 1977:70). I now want to turn to some of the

dominant codes around representing the difference of the Black male in images of sport.

b) Linford Christie: The Hot-Headed Anti-Hero

Mercer, in relation to Robert Mapplethorpe's "Man in a Polyester Suit' photograph, has

argued that:

...the dialectics of white fear and fascination underpinning colonial fantasy are

reinscribed by the exaggerated centrality of the black man's "monstrous"

phallus. The black subject is objectified into Otherness, as the size of the

penis signifies a threat to the secure identity of the white male ego and the

position of power whiteness entails in colonial discourse. (Mercer, 1994:134)

And Linford Christie on the media's obsession with his "lunchbox"(penis) has suggested:

It's the fantasies in people's minds. All the people who write about it, just

wish it was them. (Christie talking to John Inverdale, On Side, BBC1,

Tx:1.12.97)

Ask any British person to do word association with Linford Christie and you can bet that his

'lunchbox' gets a healthy mention. Christie's genitalia have become a popular cultural reference point in Britain. They also function as a 'key ethnic signifier.'[23] There is a long history of reducing Black men to their penises (c.f. Fanon, 1986), and the media has great powers in reducing an experience or an individual to such base terms.

Despite Christie's obvious commitment to running for Britain ("When I win, I win for my country...I can't be anything other than British", Christie quoted in The Guardian,11.11.95), and his position as Olympic, World, European and Commonwealth 100 metres champion, he has often been treated with deep hostility by the British media. One of the most powerful sporting images of the late twentieth century was of Christie swathed in the Union Jack during his lap of honour following the 1986 European title. For one brief representational moment, Christie had been 'nationalised'. But what stood out in the media's general treatment of Christie was their unease: a sense of simultaneous antagonism, admiration and apathy. A good example is the relative silence over his retirement compared to Sally Gunnell's lamented departure from athletics in August, 1997.[24] Thus it was not surprising to find that in the midst of his triumph, the size of his penis once again became the focal point. On the day following his gold-medal win at the 1992 World Olympics, The Sun spoke about what they called the 'contents of his lunchbox'. Comments that he was attracting the world's gaze by wearing a tight bodysuit, amounted to little more than the theory that women who wear short skirts are 'asking for it'! Christie says that he felt,

> very humiliated...My first instinct was that it was racist. There we are,
> stereotyping a black man. I can take a good joke, but it happened the day
> after I won the greatest accolade an athlete can win...If I'd been a different
> person. I could have capitalised on it, because we've had offers - 'Can we
> make lunchboxes for Linford, use his name to sell it? 'But I don't want to

make money out of something I just don't think is right. I don't want to go

through life being known for what I've got in my shorts. (Quoted in Richard

Williams, 'Lap of Honour', *The Guardian*, 11.11.95:15)

The media deflected the limelight from Christie's success. Although television itself cannot be

deemed responsible for creating this stereotype, it has, since then, reproduced it with

incredible ease, usually in the name of 'having a laugh'. In the BBC's sports quiz **They Think**

It's All Over, there is a regular sequence in which the celebrity guests have to guess who a

sporting figure is while blind-folded. In one edition, a wax-work of Christie was brought on.

Much humour was produced when, on touching the dummy's lower half, Gary Linekar said,

"It's bigger than me" and Rory Bremner went on, "Well down here there's a wax Ronnie

Corbett" (BBC1, Tx:24.10.96). Ironically, Christie announced his retirement on television

(**Sport In Question**, ITV, Tx:12.6.95). He also used this opportunity to openly criticise the

British Athletic Federation (regarding payment over televised meetings) and the British press

for paying him no respect. It is perhaps, no coincidence then that Christie's management

company (formed together with hurdler Colin Jackson) is called 'Nuff Respect'.

c) Jason Lee's Dreadlocks: 'The Ethnic Signifier'

In 1996, Nottingham Forest footballer, Jason Lee, was heavily mocked in the media, and on

television in particular, for his dreadlocked hairstyle. The 'Jason Lee affair' was played out on

our television screens and in our newspapers over a number of days. The initial trigger (for

laughter, copycat taunting and Lee's subsequent removal to a transfer-list) was a television

programme, David Baddiel and Frank Skinner's **Fantasy Football League** (BBC2,

Tx:12.6.96). Baddiel and Skinner felt they could not let Lee's display of 'indiscreet', 'natural'

Black hair go without comment. The original source of what was to become a national chuckle,

was two-fold - about his 'pineapple' hair-style and about him missing goals. The comedy

sketch showed Lee (impersonated by Baddiel) with a pineapple on his head, throwing an

empty bottle towards a dust-bin, but missing it, and then missing a cup when attempting to

put a sugar lump in it. This was followed by archive material of Lee's worst football gaffs. Lee

was said to be deeply upset about the programme and his football career subsequently took a

down-turn. The ensuing debate, played out in the media, focused on why Lee couldn't laugh at

himself. Comparing this to the type of blatant racism which Paul Ince had to face at Inter-

Milan, many (including the Professional Footballer's Association) interpreted this as gentle

mocking and Lee as being over-sensitive. Frank Skinner defended his sense of humour by

saying:

> I think Jason has a great career ahead of him. The rumour here in LA is that
>
> the man from Del Monte is about to say yes to him. Anyway, we've taken
>
> the mickey out of Andy Cole all season and it hasn't affected him, has it?
>
> (Skinner, quoted in *The Guardian*, 23.5.96:3)

The significance of the original comments can best be understood if we consider how they

manifested themselves in other, more disturbing ways which ran close to racial taunting. *The*

Sun subsequently carried a picture of Lee with bananas sprouting from his head. Fans,

including a number of school-kids, began to call him 'Pineapple head'. The comments about

Lee's hair were to do with his race and culture. 'Black hair' is a Black thing and pineapples are

a tropical fruit. Hair, as Mercer reminds us, is a 'key sign of racial difference...the most visible

stigmata of blackness, second only to the skin' (Mercer, 1994:101). Lee's ethnicity was central

to the substance of the joke; his Blackness was integral to the laughter. It represented, in a kind

of inverted way, the notion of Black peoples' physical relation to sport: instead of being

blessed by an elongated heel etc. to ensure success at sport, this Black man's sporting

performance was seen to be *hindered* not *enhanced* by his Blackness (Baddiel and Skinner played on the joke that his locks weighed him down while playing football). It was a clear example of how Black athleticism is routinely measured in relation to the Black body. Of course, one of the ironies is that dreadlocks were 'stylistically *cultivated* and politically *constructed* in a particular historical moment as part of a strategic contestation of white dominance and the cultural power of whiteness' (Mercer, 1994:108) and, furthermore, have since become a key signifier of 'street-style'.

d) Other Stereotypes of Black Masculinity in Televised Sport

Stereotypes around Black masculinity have not only been posed as a Black Vs. White issue but also function to divide our understandings of African-Caribbeans and Asians. Discourses around sport are crucial in perpetuating the dominant cultural distinctions between 'Asianness' and 'African Caribbeanness', 'us' and 'them', belonging and omission. Mercer points to the different stereotypes in the range of images of Black masculinity: 'Blacks 'fit' into... a narrow repertoire of 'types' - the supersexual stud and the sexual 'savage' on the one hand, or the delicate, fragile and exotic 'oriental' on the other' (Mercer, 1994:133). So the physical power of the Black man is often juxtaposed in representation with the softer, more erudite (but still threatening) side of the Asian man. The latter has, in recent years, been symbolised by Pakistani cricketer, Imran Khan (a committed Muslim who was educated and spent a lot of time in Britain), and most identifiably during libel legal proceedings with the England cricketer, Ian Botham, in 1996. The media treatment of the court case became a symbolic battle between two nations which have a legacy of conflict with one another. As Imran Khan's QC stated during the case, 'No one can deny that this case is emotionally charged. Issues of race, class and country move in and out of it like black clouds'. 'Beefy' Botham, an emblematic English

figure, had previously joked about Pakistan being a good place to send his mother-in-law to.[25]

During the England Vs. Pakistan cricket-test match, there were mutual accusations of cheating in a game which is founded on joint trust. Khan was said to have accused Botham and Allan Lamb of being racist, uneducated and lacking class and they, in turn, sued him for libel. Khan claimed he had been misquoted. Although Khan won the case, the media coverage ensured that he came across in both senses of the word, as being a 'bad sportsman', despite the fact that *he* was the one who had been taken to court. Of course, in the previous year Khan had married Jemima Goldsmith, the daughter of Sir James Goldsmith, a wealthy British business-man. This had raised media furore over Khan's 'hypocrisy', given his increasingly public allegiances to Islam and his British choice of partner. In subsequent media coverage, Khan became the target, not so much of the media's racial, as its religious intolerance (*his* 'conversion' of Jemima). During the coverage of the trial, the media focused, not on his cricket prowess but on Khan's pregnant wife, on his pending political career, his former 'playboy' lifestyle and his religious allegiances. Khan went from being an eligible *Hello!* darling to a decidedly dodgy professional Pakistani.

World feather-weight title-holder, 'Prince' Naseem Hamed, who openly espouses his Islamic commitments, has also gained a high media profile. Hamed's extreme confidence, rather than simply being respected, is often interpreted as arrogance. Indeed, this was the focus of one interview conducted with Naseem on the BBC's popular sports chat show, **On Side** (BBC1, Tx:8.12.97). Naseem was asked, "Wouldn't you like to be Gary Linekar? Everyone likes Gary Linekar. Don't you care about your public image?" In fact, Hamed's arrant self-confidence is central to the making of his 'public image'. It is something which he clearly plays on and it is

something which television wants. He has regularly appeared on style/youth-oriented

television shows (for example, on **The Word** and on **Baadasss TV** (18.6.96), the night before

his fight with Daniel Alicea). His designer street-style, the way he walks and talks, and his

attempt at rapping (as seen on **Top Of The Pops**) are all part of his media persona which

draws on aspects of contemporary Black style.[26] The image of supreme arrogance has been

deployed by Black-British middle-weight boxer, Chris Eubank. Eubank unquestionably plays

up to a caricature with his swagger, riding breeches and cane and is, according to the **ITN News**

(ITV, Tx:24.9.97), "the showman British fans love to hate". What comes to the fore with both

Eubank and Hamed, is how their relationship with television is based on a more obvious

system of collusion. They collude *with* the media and play up to what it likes, in order to

produce a more arresting public profile. This, in fact, is part of the process of image-building.

Just as some Black comedians, light entertainers and popular music stars 'play up' to particular

images of Blackness (see Chapters 5 and 6), so some Black sportsmen 'perform' or act in such

a way as to fit the stereotype. As such, Black sportsmen are not always subject to or outside

the process of stereotyping but, in fact, often actively involved in its production. Thus, we can

note the different ways in which stereotyping occurs - it can be something which the Black

subject is involved in to a greater or lesser extent. Jason Lee for example, was clearly not asking

to be publicly humiliated about his hair-style, and Linford Christie was not asking for the

media to focus on the size of his penis, whereas Chris Eubank or Mike Tyson have attracted

public attention in more deliberate ways.

We also need to note *what* these stereotypes of Black masculinity are based on. Certainly,

they can differ, but they often relate to his physical or mental state (for example, his penis, his

arrogance or his bad attitude). Black sportsmen have often been framed within what Mercer

has called 'a logic of dehumanization' (Mercer, 1994:138). When emotions are used, they are

often seen to be squandered/used in a negative way (aggression, anger, being 'hot-headed', or

'losing control'). The notion that Black athletes are 'on the edge' but never central, is another

code used in representations of Black sports-players. For example, Ian Wright's

'temperament' has recurrently been commented on in this way ('Wright on the Edge', *The*

Guardian Sport 97, 29.8.97). Hugh McIlvanney, in a recent article in *The Sunday Times*

(which was supposed to be examining Wright's claims about Schmeichel's racist remarks)

spoke of Ian Wright's 'hair-trigger explosiveness' and of him as 'fitting the definition of a

perfectly balanced character by having a chip on each shoulder' (*The Sunday Times*, 23.2.97:5).

(It is interesting to note that Derek Redmond used precisely those same words to describe

Linford Christie.) On an edition of the **ITN News** (ITV, Tx:29.8.97) the commentary stated,

"Wright has a reputation as the bad boy of English football...he is back in the headlines for all

the wrong reasons...He does boil over now and again".

If we turn to Frank Bruno, we can see very different structures of representation at work. In

his paper on the media treatment of Frank Bruno and Salman Rushdie, Gilroy has noted how:

> The different ways in which the class and the masculinity of both men
>
> worked to portray wider ideas of race and national identity needs to be located
>
> in the context of the historic folk grammar of British racism...This common
>
> sense perspective specifies that animal blacks enjoy an excess of brute
>
> physicality and wily oriental gentlemen conversely display a surfeit of
>
> cerebral power, while only the authentic Anglo-Brit is able to luxuriate in the
>
> perfect equilibrium of body and mind. (Gilroy, 1993b:89)

The dominant culture of racial representation has married the concept of being 'good at sport'

with being 'not very intelligent'. Bruno ('Our Frank', Gilroy, 1993b:86) is the perfect

embodiment of this union. He is also one of the best-known national Black personalities. As well as being seen in the boxing-ring, he regularly appears on chat shows, quiz shows and a number of 'light entertainment' programmes. He functions as a harmless lovable icon for the nation; the very antithesis of the aggressive Black man (ironic given the fact that he competes in boxing heavyweight, one of the harshest sports there is). Bruno has been accused of being an 'Uncle Tom', of selling out to a predominantly White media.[27] But Gilroy suggests that Bruno 'toys cleverly with the White audience's expectation that he is nothing more than a punch-drunk buffoon' (Gilroy, 1993b:90). He goes on to point out how Bruno, like so many other British sports stars (e.g. Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards), is still lovable in defeat, and perhaps because of it. Walter Ellis in *The Sunday Telegraph* stated that, 'In the area of Englishness he is tops, the champ, the number one man'. The ease with which the British media slips into its paternalistic role with Bruno reveals much about how he has been socially constructed in relation to Britishness and about the slippage that routinely occurs in, and between, representations of Black masculinity. On the news of Bruno's retirement, we were told on **News At One** that "He's been adopted by fans as Britain's best sportsman" (Tx:29.8.96). Britain (as signified by and negotiated through the British media, his wife Laura and Bruno's verbal sparring partner, sports presenter Harry Carpenter) has been encouraged to open its nationalistic arms to Frank.

The question of whether or not Bruno is a beneficiary of White racism ('acting it up') or a victim of it, corresponds to the playing on/off debates I looked at in relation to comedy. The price of *not* playing the game or of not playing up to a particular caricature of 'Blackness', has most clearly been seen with the example of Jason Lee not getting 'the British sense of humour' or Linford Christie just taking things too seriously. We can juxtapose the solemnity of Khan

with the comedic flair of Frank Bruno and the sporadic laughter of athlete Kriss Akabusi, to

see that there is more than one stereotype of racial difference. The nuances of these

stereotypes can further be understood as differentiating between the 'genuinely British'

(Bruno's South London roots) and definite racial Others. Khan is packaged as shrewd and

untrustworthy, not 'assimilating' to his British connections, but 'maltreating' them, as

witnessed by his allegiance with Pakistani Muslims and in his 'thieving' and subsequent

transformation of a young, rich, blonde English woman. These images of Black sportsmen are

formed through distinct frameworks which are crucially developed in and by television. Each

man functions as a signifier for his respective 'imagined community' which is deciphered, for

the most part, by the degree to which he/his 'community' is seen - or not seen - to integrate

with the British temperament. Imran Khan is seen as more than the sum of his cricket parts

(solemn - religiously fanatical - cheat); Barnes and Christie are peripheral to Britishness .

despite their allegiance and alliance to it; and Bruno is the adopted personality who's comedic

talent and 'nice bloke' Londoner image supersedes his sporting prowess ('a kind of Gary

Wilmot in Lonsdale trimmings', Gilroy, 1993b:87).[28]

e) Black Sports-stars, Media Economies and the Role of Commercialism

Black sports-players are now central to the way media economies operate. We can see how old

and new modes of thinking of Blackness are at play in sporting contexts. Black sports icons or

'trophy-men' (e.g. Ian Wright, John Fashanu,[29] Stan Collimore) are legitimised through

traditional uses of the 'raced' body (physical, manual) while also representing modernity

(commercialism, style, consumption). The dynamics between fixity and movement, tradition

and modernity are at work here. The commercial space is arguably one in which Black

sportsmen are beginning to 'look back'. Black faces and personalities have become increasingly

central to the marketing of sporting products, from trainers to Lucozade Hi-energy drinks. Part

of this can be read within the context of the 1990s phenomenon of Black radical chic

(discussed in Chapter 6), alongside sport's influential role in defining modern subcultural style.

Mild interest in branded motifs such as the Dunlop Green Flash in the 1970s has turned into

the fully-fledged 'trainer culture' of the 1990s: an obsession with wearing the *right* trainers and

the *right* tracksuit top. Sporting style, appropriated from skateboarding and hip-hop styles are

everywhere to be seen, from kids' show presenters to 'Britpop' stars to the catwalks. Leaning

heavily on the Utopian ethos of sport, today's trainer culture (as signified in the Nike ads)

represents freedom and universality in the modern world. Black stars in these images of style

often play out what Majors has called 'cool pose' (Majors, 1986:184-5). 'Pleasure in being

looked at', or 'cool pose', as well as being seen in sporting performance, can also be found in

'attitude', language and dress; all of which make the Black sporting star easily 'representable',

upgrade their commodity-value and flavour the cult of personality.[30] As a rare Asian example,

Prince Naseem represents this beautifully.

The WBC World Heavyweight Competition between Bruno and Tyson (March 1996) was one

of the highest-profile sporting media events of recent years and made television history in

breaking with the British broadcasting tradition of universal access. Sky owned the viewing

rights and implemented, for the first time, a pay-per-view system.[31] What was particularly

interesting at the time, was how the rest of the media (and mostly the tabloid press) mounted a

host of 'Save Our Sports' crusades. A debate ensued about ownership, control and the media.

(It is doubtful that a large-budget drama production would have raised such a debate and

triggered such national zeal.) Sport, in the 1990s, has become *the* pawn in battles between

terrestrial and cable/satellite channels since the latter have secured rights to major sporting

events such as the FA English Premiership. Developing economic structures have forced shifts

in access which have, in turn, changed the way 'the nation' now has to relate to sport and the

way sport itself is packaged. Marcus Plantin asks the question, 'Would Jonah Lomu have

become part of Rugby World Cup folklore had the competition been on Sky rather than on

ITV?' (Plantin, *The Guardian*, 10.7.95.) Prominent national figures such as Bruno and Tyson

make good box-office. Prior to the much-hyped contest, Bruno and Tyson were clearly

packaged by the British media as definable racial types; Bruno was made to look like a wide-

eyed minstrel-ish vaudeville act and Tyson as a menacing violent Black aggressor (*The Sunday*

Times, 10.3.96). As reported by *The Sunday Times,* 'Healthy ticket sales are based on the

expectation of an execution. Bruno is viewed as a tiresome bit of clutter' (10.3.96).

Conclusion

Sport is a major source of the image of modern Blackness and its recurrent place in television

undoubtedly serves to perpetuate the already-existing notion of what Blackness constitutes.

Notions of heterogeneous Blackness are inevitably undercut by the high visibility of Black

athleticism. Biological and cultural essentialist views of Blackness are, often inadvertently,

reproduced by television. Because of the obvious requirement for 'talent' in sport and the

other major body genre, light entertainment, the impression given is that television simply

reflects flair and thus that Black people, in terms of television's system of representation, are

kept in their natural place. The social, political and ideological aspects which regulate where

Black people are, and are not seen, are made invisible through this process of naturalisation.

There are a few concluding points that I want to make here.

First, the stereotypes of Black masculinity in sport texts serve the contexts in which they are

used. Stereotypes of Black masculinity have been central to televised sport and the emphasis

has overwhelmingly been on racial *difference*. We have seen, however, that the fascination with

difference represents a convoluted (rather than a simply negative) form of racism. These

stereotypes work in very different ways; they are not all 'negative' or 'positive', but nearly

always ambivalent in the ways in which they invite us to look. 'Icon-ising', after all, is the

making of someone into something unreal - good or bad. Indeed, if we consider the basic image

of a Black sport winner, this can be considered as either or, indeed, both a 'positive' image

(winning, achieving, pride, discipline) and/or a 'negative' image (body-focused, voyeuristic).

But the dual or multi-codification of Black sports personalities is also, of course, a key feature

of representing the Other (Hall, 1997). Thus, the speed with which public images of Linford

Christie swathed in the Union Jack, were followed by the public discourse around his penis

size, point to the contrasting, ambivalent and binary ways in which racial difference can be

presented. In any case, stereotypes themselves function in ambivalent and coded ways. As

Hall explains, 'stereotypes refer as much to what is imagined in fantasy as to what is perceived

as 'real'. And, what is visually produced, by the practices of representation, is only half the

story. The other half - the deeper meaning - lies in *what is not being said, but is being*

fantasized, what is implied but cannot be shown' (Hall, 1997:263).

Whilst there are various images of Black masculinity in sport, 'Blackness' is nearly always

'marked' and 'over-emphasised'. The 'freakishness' and 'difference' of Black male physicality

has, as we have seen, been a key feature of this: in television news' recurrent fascination with

the New Zealand rugby player, Jonah Lomu (referred to as "the freak" by the England Rugby

Captain); in Frank Bruno as the larger than life national cuddly bear; in the novelty-value of

dread-locked show-jumper Oliver Skeetes. And if it is not the whole body that is considered,

then the Black man's body is fragmented for fetishistic value; Linford Christie's 'lunchbox',

Jason Lee's 'pineapple hair cut' - but always something 'distinctly Black' and *different* to the

White norm, as if these physical aspects shape the nature of the athlete's ability and the way

we need to interpret their whole. Of course, there are also a number of distinct codes through

which Black women in sport have been represented, and these are often in relation to classic

notions of Black femininity. Thus, US sprinter (and three times gold medal winner at the 1988

Olympics at Seoul) Florence Griffith-Joyner ("Flo Jo"), was often noted for her 'dangerous',

'feline' long nails; and her sister, Jackie Joyner-Kersee (gold heptathlon winner) for her

'gorilla-ness' (see *Sunday Times*, 1988 Olympic Special, 9.10.88, and Stuart Hall's 'The

Spectacle of the Other' in Hall, 1997:225-290).

The second point, is that the sporting arena can function as a circus for this presumed

gladitorial instinct. Containment is central to the social construction of Black masculinity on

television. Of course, deviance within sport is also a characteristic of the rougher version of the

Black male type. Tyson's much-publicised ear-biting of Holyfield, reproduced a set of

prehistoric terms around primitivism/savagery ("Tyson's moment of savagery", **ITN News at**

One, ITV, Tx:9.7.97). Going back to the colonial sporting impetus to replace disorder with

control, the dominance of Black men in sport today continues to connote both physical

mastery but also the primeval. Sport is a strangely respected yet denigrated space. Sport in

representation has promoted itself as apolitical but - from Jesse Owens' refusal to give the

Hitler salute after winning four Olympic Gold medals in 1936, to Linford Christie's refusal to

play the media game, to Muhammad Ali's deep-rooted political emphasis that he was not *just*

a boxer - Black men have struggled to prove that they are more than gormless entertainers in

the sporting circus. In so doing, they have revealed the deep connections between the sporting

and political arenas. Sport is a classic zone which relies heavily on observation of the body (a 'spectator sport') but shifts between not explicitly acknowledging that 'Blackness' exists, to not letting its subjects 'transcend race' (biology controlling all). It rests somewhere between what Gilroy has identified as the two key approaches to Black experiences in cultural representation: on the one hand, the commodification approach which trafficks Blackness while depoliticising it and, on the other, the anti-marketeer approach which sees all Black cultures and manifestations of it as necessarily carrying essential and unchanging racial and thus political meaning (Gilroy, 1993b:3-5).

The final point, is that we can see in the increased participation of Black-British players in some sports that the sense of community which has traditionally bonded supporters, teams and nation, is now being forced to incorporate Black people into a new community. The territoriality regarding 'the British nation' is still clearly felt by many, although this history has shown how Black-British subjects have been simultaneously excluded and appropriated as part of the national experience.[32] So once again (and this relates to other areas such as Black-British film and youth cultures), we are talking of 'redefining Britishness' and of dismantling the narrow conception of what the term 'British' has come to mean. Sport is at the heart of these dramas around national identity. A revision of England and Britishness necessarily takes place at the level of the sport text. Going back to the beginning of the argument, British sport perpetually denies its hybrid realities in its support for the national singular, while playing on the anxieties which mass global transformations inevitably trigger ('we must support England before it slips away'). When it suits, there is no biological nexus between race and nation; Black people are deemed alien, different, Other. At other times, Black people are invested in as British. This dual reaction towards Black people (as both 'inside' and 'outside'), is indicative

of the ambivalence at work in the media sporting text, but also of the vulnerable (ideological)

position of Black-British sports players. Of course the national character is always contingent.

At the time of writing (post Diana and early Blair), much is being said about how we are

witnessing a new, improved version of Britain; more communal, informal and 'feminised' and

less menacing in its national pride. And perhaps this is true. But it is also clear that the system

of indexing difference (certainly in sport) still, in the main, works ambivalently when it touches

racial and national lines.

NOTES

[1] For example, the BBC provided extensive transmission of the 1996 'summer of sport' (Euro '96, Wimbledon, The Olympics) on BBC1, and this shifted a number of programmes (such as children's programmes) to its 'second channel', BBC2 so that "it can maintain a consistent schedule" (*Sight & Sound*, July 1996, 37).

[2] In 1992, the BBC negotiated with Britain's leading satellite broadcaster, BSkyB, over rights deals for FA English Premiership Football. BSkyB secured the exclusive live TV rights and the BBC was granted rights to broadcast highlights.

[3] Note for example, that the 1998 football World Cup winners, France, had eight players of non-Eropean descent.

[4] Despite football's alignment with 'Englishness', coverage of the game has become increasingly globalised with large chunks of the television audience now tuning in to NBA Basketball, NFL Superbowl and Channel 4's transmission of Italian Football (and Gazzetta Football Italia). Channel 4 also screens **Planet Football** which reflects the global phenomenon.

[5] During the first round of the Wimbledon tournament in 1996, L. Paes was referred to throughout as 'the Indian' and called 'the little man from Calcutta'. When his opponent, the White British MRJ Petchey, missed a shot, it was "Sadly...", "Unlucky" and "a pity". Throughout the commentary, we were invited to know Petchey on a personal level with references to his forthcoming marriage and endless shots of his family/girlfriend watching him play. Petchey was ranked 202, Paes 142, but Paes was merely referred to as 'a good grass player.' It was not so much racism at work here, as deep patriotism which obstructed respect for other people's sportsmanship. Note also the British media's obsession with English tennis-hope, Tim Henman.

[6] Charles Murray's The Bell Curve (1994) for example put forward the theory of differences in intelligence between Black and White people. Such distinctions have been supported by psychologists such as Jean Phillipe Rushton (University of Western Ontario) and Richard Lynn of Ulster University. Rushton has argued that (what he calls) 'Negroids' are not as intelligent as 'Caucasoids' (Race, Evolution and Behaviour 1994) and that they are more aggressive and highly sexed. His research also involves a comparison of penis size and he concludes, "It's a trade-off: more brain or more penis. You can't have everything"(quoted in *The Guardian*, 1.5.96, 2).

[7] Bannister is an ex-sprinter who broke the 4-minute mile in 1954, and subsequently became a sports scientist.

[8] This was recently highlighted with the effects of Christopher Brand's book, The g Factor: General Intelligence and its Implications which started as an acclaimed, 'scientific' study of intelligence but developed into a suggestion that "single mothers should be encouraged to mate with higher male IQ males in order to widen the gene pool of their offspring" (quoted in *The Guardian*, 1.5.96,2).

[9] At the 1996 CRE conference, Herman Ouseley stated that when the BBC **Sportsnight** anchorman, Bob Wilson, left for ITV and Britain's 'blue-eyed sporting hero', Gary Linekar, was considered a natural

successor, he wrote to the BBC and suggested that they should have considered a woman or a Black person for the post.

[10] The possibilities of social mobility happening on any significant level for Black men in sport has been argued against by Maguire in Jarvie, 1991, 94-123. Also see Hall (1977) 'Pluralism, Race and Class in Caribbean Society' in Race and Class in Post-Colonial Society, New York: UNESCO,158-182 for how social mobility can be determined by both cultural and physical factors.

[11] In her article 'Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?' (1974), Sherry Ortner argues that women are 'identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture' (p.73). My point here is that since representations of Black men in sport are clearly aligned with nature, the female/nature, male/culture dichotomy is not always held in place. Also see Shulamith Firestone (1970) The Dialectic Of Sex, GB, The Women's Press LTD.

[12] See Dyer's analysis of 'White men's muscles', mainly in the context of cinema,1997, 145-183.

[13] James, a Caribbean, came to England in 1932 on the request of the Trinidadian cricketer Learie Constantine (who had contributed to the BBC series **Travellers' Tales** on the subject of calypso in the mid-1940s). James was a cricket reporter for the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Glasgow Herald*. He went on to become a key figure in the Trotskyist moivement, write plays and books and acted in films (alongside Paul Robeson). He was a formidable and generous scholar and revolutionary (see Fryer, 1984 on CLR James) (see also Chapter 1).

[14] Note the first West Indian tour to England in 1900, the appointment of Frank Worrell as the first Black captain of the West Indian Test team in 1960 and England's defeat in 1950.

[15] The heat of the battle was crystallised perfectly in ex-England Captain, Tony Greig's determination to not only beat the West Indies, but 'to make them grovel' (quoted in McDonald, 1984, 10-11).

[16] As the German press reminded us during the Euro '96 tournament prior to the Germany V England semi-final (26.6.96) (no doubt in an attempt to hit some Brits where it hurts), Britain are likely to be bitter about their opponents in sport since today they have to face the fact that their own ex-colonies are defeating them at cricket.

[17] In the 1980s, international tennis champion, Arthur Ashe, was not permitted to play in certain places (Coakley, 1994:248). There is plenty of evidence to suggest that unofficial segregation still exists e.g golf and tennis club membership. The excuse of geographical exclusivity for membership or participation often has a racial dimension (e.g. Yorkshire county club only fielding those born within the Shire counties) and finance and acceptability still remain hurdle for those Black people wanting to join 'premier' clubs.

[18] This can be connected to the ways in which Black people (Josephine Baker, etc) were dominantly regarded in relation to dance and music (see Chapter 6).

[19] The first Black professional football player in England was Arthur Wharton (Preston North End goalkeeper in 1886). Many early Black (particularly football) players had to face a large degree of racism. Walter Daniel Tull (1909-10/Tottenham Hotspur) was dropped after just six games after he was racially abused at a match in Bristol. In the early 1930s, those selecting players for England, withdrew an offer to Jack Leslie after realising he was Black. The contribution that many Black players made to British sporting history has often gone undocumented. For example, early players such as Charlie Williams (who played for Doncaster Rovers in the 1940s before he became a popular comedian) are omitted from the Encyclopaedia of Association Footballers even under the section titled 'Coloured Players'.

[20] Of Bill Richmond, Pierce Egan said, 'We cannot omit stating of our hero that he is intelligent, communicative and well behaved' (Egan, *Boxiana*, 1912). Albert Johanssen was the first player in a Wembley Cup Final (1965). A BBC documentary profile of Johanssen, **Picture This: Remember Albert** BBC2, Tx:27.8.96), focused predominantly on how he died a drunk and on how his friends tried to help him sober up. There was little mention of why he became so disillusioned or how his upbringing in apartheid South Africa (he felt he wasn't good enough to bathe with the White footballers) or the racial jaunting which he regularly faced here, affected his footballing career. One of his colleagues interviewed in the documentary, recalled that the jungle sounds which fans made when he was around, "was one of the things he couldn't adapt to".

[21] Jack Johnson had been the first Black heavyweight champion twenty years earlier.

[22] My use of the word 'pornography' is quite different from that employed by many feminists in the 1970s such as Andrea Dworkin, Sheila Jeffries and Catherine MacKinnon. I use it rather to refer to the representation of images which might offer space for the realm of sexual fantasy and abstract desires to

work. In this sense, it is quite different from opinions such as those held by Andrea Dworkin, that 'pornography is reality' (Dworkin in Wilson, 1982).

[23] The term 'key ethnic signifier' is used by Kobena Mercer in relation to hair in 'Black Hair/Style Politics' (Mercer, 1994, 97-128:103).

[24] The Commission For Racial Equality used Christie in their 'Roots of The Future Initiative' (1996) with a large picture of Christie alongside the question 'WHAT DO YOU SEE, GOLD OR BLACK?' Although he was considered an apt symbol for the CRE campaign, Christie has failed to become a successful commercial commodity in Britain.

[25] Botham's attitude mirrored the broad intolerance which Britain has long displayed towards Pakistan; a sustained aversion which has been evident since the clash of politics between Earl Mountbatten and General Zia-ul-Haq and heightened following the legacy of partition.

[26] Note that When Naseem entered the ring on a theatrical throne carried by six Black men in loin cloths, The Voice (18.6.96) accused him of dealing in colonial stereotypes. It also said, 'Hamed likes to talk and act like a Black man...But when it comes down to it Naz, face facts, you're not a BROTHER.'

[27] This was discussed on 'I'm Not An Uncle Tom', BBC Radio 5, 7.6.96

[28] Bruno's interest in pantomime and 'light entertainment' has been echoed in other Black sporting stars' career patterns. Errol Christie, one of the best known light middleweight boxers of the 1980s now aims to have his own television comedy series (The Guardian, 18.9.96, 14-15) and Chris Eubank is often seen on the chat-show circuit and has ambitions to be a prominent British actor (he has turned his gym into an acting studio). On **Friday's Night All Wright** (ITV, Tx:8.5.98), Eubank was one of Ian Wright's guests and declared, "When in England, I'm an Englishman".

[29] John Fashanu's brother, Justin (whose move to Nottingham Forest in 1981 made him the first million pound Black footballer) died tragically on 3.5.98. Some claimed that discrimination (Fashanu was openly gay) led him to take his own life (Tatchell, The Guardian, 5.5.98). In Januray 1992, Fashanu appeared on BBC2's **Open To Question**. His life and death was the subject of **Inside Story : Justin Fashanu - Fallen Hero** (BBC1, Tx:3.9.98).

[30] Laura Mulvey has said in relation to scopophilia, 'There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at' , 1975, 207.

[31] According to Aerial (the BBC staff magazine) between 500,000 and 600,000 people subscribed to the first TV pay-per-view session (19.03.96, Wk 12). Sky has three dedicated sports channels.

[32] Footballer Vinny Jones' recently commented on how 'foreigners' are taking over 'his' sport in Britain and thought it inevitable that 'the British' would find this annoying. He turned this statement on his interviewer, Gaby Roslin, and asked how she would feel if loads of foreign interviewers threatened her position (**The Gaby Roslin Show**, Channel 4, Tx:11.5.96).

Chapter Eight

Casting the Black Subject in British Television Drama

> Representation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies the
>
> active work of selecting, and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not
>
> merely the transmitting of already existing meaning, but the more active
>
> labour of *making things mean*. (Hall, 1982)

> ...only through the imagination, which is always subjective, is "objective
>
> reality" assimilated: a life without imagination does not exist. (Ang,
>
> 1985:83)

All television genres are, in some way, part of a system of representation. Although an element

of their production might involve, to a greater or lesser extent, representing what is happening

'out there' (sport, news, variety), their processes of selection and production also serve to

create meaning. With drama, we can speak more unequivocally in terms of 'representation'

rather than 'reflection', given the preparatory labour and creative basis on which drama is

produced. There is no pre-given reality to reproduce in dramatic form, only a set of choices to

make about *how, who and what* to represent.[1] Drama entails a number of deliberate and

predetermined decisions about scripting, casting, directing and producing. Drama also shows us

clear examples of how cultural 'typing' depends on the use of markers related to such variables

as race, gender, profession and age. Drama (although it can attract high monetary and critical

rewards), is expensive to produce, takes a long time to make and requires the use of a number

of diverse skilled workers (such as actors, writers, directors). It is, as such, a big investment for

television and because of that, arguably, increasingly less likely to take risks. Partly because of

the pre-meditative process of production, drama has been at the heart of talks around

multicultural content, integrated casting and minority access and regarded as a potential space

where considered alterations in representations of 'race' can be made. It has also been a central

case in point in many of the debates around realism, stereotypes and positive/negative images.

All these factors make the history of television drama a pivotal area of study in examining how

different programme-makers, over time, have consciously developed images of 'Blackness'.

Since its inception, television drama has undergone significant changes in the way it has been

structured. It remains one of the most diverse areas of programming (see Self, 1984). In this

chapter, I loosely distinguish television drama as narrative fiction made for television, although

it is difficult to talk about television drama in single terms, since the genre incorporates many

different formats. These have included the long-running, continuous, serial form (the soap

opera), the limited run series (e.g. **Brideshead Revisited**), the formulaic one-hour series (e.g.

Soldier Soldier), the anthology which acts as an umbrella for diverse, single productions

(such as **Armchair Theatre, The Wednesday Play**) and the occasional 'one-off'. It is also

hard to separate television drama from the area of film, since many dramas featuring Black

actors or produced by Black artists are films made for television or for cinema with 'television

money'. Indeed, the distinction between the cinefilm and telefilm is not always a clearcut one.[2]

A lot of so-called 'Black dramas' have actually been short pieces shot on film. In addition,

there are a number of Black production and writers' schemes today, with the prime objective

of getting the end-product seen on-screen, be it television or cinema. Thus, some of the issues I

raise here, will also relate to the next chapter on Black-British film.

What I am particularly interested in here, is how Black-Britishness has been negotiated within

and across distinct narrative forms and in which types of television drama and roles Black

actors have been cast. I also want to look at the meanings which have been associated with

Black characters, and consider the senses in which they have influenced the plot and structure

of the narratives in which they appear. This chapter will be far more textually-based than the

last two, but since the area of drama is so huge, there are a number of programmes and related

issues that warrant more detailed analysis than I can do justice to here. A fair amount has been

written about Black drama in the 1980s (Daniels & Gerson, 1989, Pines, 1992) and although I

will review some of those debates here, I do not merely want to repeat them. Although I will

identify some of the critical responses to texts, I am more concerned with the historical

specificities and contexts of the selected programmes, and with what they can tell us about

patterns of Black representation in television fiction. I will roughly follow a chronological

approach, although some parts of sections will also be defined by types of drama (for example,

I will look at a single drama in Section 1, a serial in Section 2 and a number of popular series in

Section 3).

My choice of case studies attempts to focus on specific texts which are both exemplary and

unrepresentative of the types of dramas and roles in which Black characters have been seen.

Thus the case of **Fable** (BBC, 1965) fits into the liberal and reformist trend underpinning so

many social democratic discourses of the period. At the same time, **Fable** is notable for being a

BBC single play which defiantly moved away from social realism which had, to date, been the

preferred aesthetic in representations of 'race relations' on British television. The case study

of **The Jewel In The Crown** (Granada/ITV, 1984) meanwhile, can usefully be read within the

cycle of other populist 'return to empire' narratives of the 1980s such as **A Passage To India**

(1984), **Heat and Dust** (1982) and **The Far Pavilions** (Channel 4, 1984), but it is arguably

the most complex of these. I will end the chapter by focusing on how selected mainstream

drama texts such as **Prime Suspect 2** (ITV, 1994), **This Life** (BBC2, 1996-7) and **Holding**

On (BBC2, 1997) have noticeably integrated Black representation into their texts and ask

whether this really does mark a breakthrough in terms of the way Black people have been

represented in the genre. Although the selected case studies can by no means be said to

highlight all the themes and debates around Black characterisation in drama, they do aim to give

some insight into the different ways in which 'Blackness' has been imagined and into how

television drama itself has changed over the years.

Section 1: The Early Dramatic Tradition

a) Early Dramas

From the outset, drama was a central feature of the British broadcasting tradition. In 1937 (a

year after the opening of BBC Television on a regular basis), there were a total of 123 drama

transmissions (including repeats and short plays). Television drama began as a live medium

and, as such, had obvious links with theatre. Stage productions such as **The Emperor Jones**

(BBCTV, Tx:11.5.38, 1953), **All God's Chillun Got Wings** (BBCTV, Tx:16.9.46) and **Deep**

are The Roots (BBCTV, Tx:7.5.50) all featured Black actors and many went on to be adapted

for television.[3] Paul Robeson (who appeared in **Othello** alongside Peggy Ashcroft in the 1930

Old Vic production) and Elisabeth Welch stood out as key Black role models. During the

1930s, many working-class Black Britons from areas such as Cardiff, London's East End and

Liverpool would also travel to Shepperton and Beaconsfield in order to earn some extra money

playing bit-parts and extras (to add a touch of authenticity) in films such as **The Thief of**

Bagdad (1940), **Sanders of the River** (1934), **Black Narcissus** (1947) and in all of

Robeson's films with the exception of **The Proud Valley** (1940) (see Chapter 6 for more on

Robeson's work; also see Bourne, 1998:43-63). For professional actors, establishing a theatre

career often meant having to take small parts or work as understudies. Pauline Henriques for

example, despite her training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, found

herself 'playing a variety of American Coloured maids' (quoted in Pines, 1992:26). After

understudying Georgia Burke in the American Negro Theatre Production of **Anna Lucasta**

(1947-8), Henriques, together with other understudies such as Errol John, Earl Cameron and

Rita Williams, formed a theatre production group which was eventually to become the base for

a Black-British Theatre Movement. Henriques subsequently made her television debut

alongside Robert Adams and Edric Connor in Eugene O'Neill's **All God's Chillun Got Wings**

(BBCTV, 16.9.46) which was screened live by the BBC from Alexandra Palace and which also

starred Robert Adams,[4] Joyce Herron and Edric Connor.

The most striking aspect of the earlier part of this history is how so many Black actors in

Britain had a passion for the arts and specifically for drama and theatre. The enterprising and

enthusiastic ways in which Black actors used and developed their creative talent was

remarkable. There was not a huge amount of theatre work available for Black actors but

opportunities such as production tours, the use of the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on

Sunday nights (with the help of Oscar Lewenstein and George Devine) and even access to

school/town halls all proved useful. Here, the role of Pearl and Edric Connor's agency from

1956, was pivotal in securing Black artists rights and profiling and promoting their talents (see

Chapter 6 for more on the work of the agency). The Connors were also instrumental in setting

up the Negro Theatre Workshop in the early 1960s. This included about thirty Black actors

and dancers, some of whom went on to develop careers in television (for example, Nina Baden-

Semper who went on to star in **Love Thy Neighbour** and **Brothers and Sisters**, Oscar James

who appeared in **Eastenders**, Cy Grant, Lloyd Reckord and Nadia Cattouse). The thing that seemed to ease the pain of waiting and hoping for decent theatrical roles and media exposure was the obvious sense of community and support which many young Black actors in England shared. Spaces such as the newly-established Africa Centre, the Keskidee Centre (set up by former CARD member, Oscar Abrams, in order to encourage Black artists, playwrights and poets), the socialist Unity Theatre and the West Indian Students' Centre (where the West Indian Students' Drama Group would meet around 1957-8), were essential in building networks, relationships and solidarity for those interested in the arts.

Within the general context of television marginalisation, the BBC play **A Man From The Sun** (BBCTV, Tx:8.11.56) was quite exceptional. It was the first time that the lives of Caribbean settlers in Britain were explored in television drama. In this production, Cy Grant starred alongside Earl Cameron, Gloria Simpson, Errol John, Nadia Cattouse and Sonny McKenzie. Writer John Elliot wanted the play to deal with 'the clash between this mythical Britain and the actual grotty Britain, which West Indians would face when they got here', seeing this as a 'terribly important and exciting conflict' (quoted in Pines, 1992:86). Elliot wanted his play to focus on the differences between cultures, customs and countries without citing these as necessarily problematic. **A Man From The Sun** was a live production and according to Elliot 'rather in the tradition of the prewar GPO movies'. The play had a realist documentary feel, being very dialogue-led (it was the documentary section of the drama department which showed interest in the play). Other notable productions of the time included the BBC's version of Marc Connelly's **The Green Pastures** in 1958, which included sixty Black actors (rehearsals for the production initially took place in Notting Hill but were interrupted by the riots in the area). One year later, the television adaptation of Ted Willis' **Hot Summer Night**

(ABC/ITV, Tx:1.2.59) was broadcast as part of the **Armchair Theatre** series (in this, Lloyd Reckord played the boyfriend of a White liberal's daughter). The first fully-fledged drama series with a central Black character was **Rainbow City** (BBC1, Tx:5.7-9.8.67), which was developed by actor/writer Horace James and John Elliot. **Rainbow City** starred James, Carmen Munroe and Errol John as a Black lawyer with a White wife. It was a six-part dramatised series about the lives of West Indians in Britain.

Whilst we can note that some of these early roles were actually quite honourable, in general, light entertainment and variety (see Chapter 6) was where British television audiences were most likely to see Black, and usually Black-American, artists. The most prominent non-American Black dramatic actors were Edric Connor, Robert Adams and Pauline Henriques. But television drama work - apart from the bit-parts - was hard to come by. Although it is easy to judge some early Black actors as naive in taking up the so-called 'Uncle Tom' and 'Aunt Jemima' server-roles (see Bogle, 1991), the fact is that, for many, these less dignified television appearances not only sometimes led to classical theatre roles but also to opportunities in television and film. In terms of financial survival, the more mundane television roles (rather than the diverse theatre ones) also tended to be better-paid. Since the political conditions were quite different at this time, the attitudes of the actors themselves differed. As Colin Prescod, whose mother Pearl was an actress in the 1950s, says:

> I didn't feel as though any one was making or being part of productions that
> they should feel ashamed of. One has to say about my mother and those that
> she worked with, that they were colonised people; they weren't looking to be
> too critical of the hands held out to them by liberal Whites who wanted to do
> Black stuff...what I mean by the colonised mind is that they just felt happy
> getting work in order to get seen and that was the job of the actor. My
> mother had to do lots and lots of work before she got recognised - a lot of

bandana-head work and small parts - and as a consequence of that somebody

actually saw her. (Prescod, interview with Malik, 19.11.96)

At the same time, there was also an obvious political impetus behind the work of some Black

artists including Pearl and Edric Connor, John Larose (who, with the Black Parents'

Movement, had been a key player in a 'supplementary' Black education centre, the George

Padmore School), and writer Obi Egbuna (who had formed the Universal Coloured Peoples'

Association in June 1967 and was subsequently imprisoned in Britain for police death-

threats). Apart from the Connors' agency and the occasional helping-hand from organisations

such as the British Film Institute (in supporting Edric Connor's film projects in the 1960s, for

example), Black artists in England were, as Pearl Connor explains, 'like a voice in the

wilderness. There was no financial backing, and no black person, or businessman, or enterprise

to help us. There wasn't funding at the level that there is now' (quoted in Pines, 1992:39). The

Equity membership rule that an actor required forty weeks work experience in the West End,

along with the fact that there was no Black section within Equity to represent Black artists,

effectively blocked Equity access for most Black actors in Britain (there were exceptions like

Horace James and Lloyd Reckord who did receive Equity membership). Connor says that

Equity's stance at that time - that there was no difference between people - simply overlooked

the fact that racial discrimination was affecting Black actors chances of getting work. This was

also the time when some of these Black artists, rather than just performing, wanted to produce

their own programmes (Edric Connor - see Chapter 6) and films (Lloyd Reckord - see Chapter

9) but were generally being turned down.

A lot of the disillusionment amongst Black actors also stemmed from the fact that quite often,

the parts they went for were defined as 'White roles'. This of course, made it difficult to explain the common practice of White actors 'blacking up' to play Asian or African-Caribbean characters, although this was often justified by casting directors' claims that Black actors lacked experience.[5] Generally speaking, 'blacking up' was less of a problem in more experimental productions which had few commercial pressures, but in terms of international productions, blockbuster movies or big-budget television mini series, the tendency was to cast White actors in the big roles. Zia Mohyeddin, who had a relatively busy acting career from the 1960s through to the 1980s[6] recounts how:

> It was somehow assumed that black and Asian actors weren't good enough. I
> heard this again and again, and hurt even more when people said to me 'Oh,
> well, you're all right, but you know that Asians and blacks can't act - their
> style isn't right. Somehow when they come in front of the camera or on the
> stage, they're either too big or overpowering, and they just don't mix with
> the style of the production...(Mohyeddin, quoted in Pines, 1992:73)

Retrospectives have largely cited the late 1950s and 1960s as the Golden Age of British drama and the ratings-led series/serials formats (the 'soap-operafication' of British drama) which succeeded it, as the prime reason for its demise. The relative autonomy of the single format, meant that writers could, in a sense, 'hit and run', say their bit and then move on to their next project. When the BBC's second channel (BBC2) began on 20 April, 1964 it became, amongst other things, an outlet for new single drama slots such as **Story Parade** and **Theatre 625**. But the introduction of one-off drama slots was also ratings-led. For example, Sydney Newman's (then Head of BBC Drama) idea for **The Wednesday Play** (BBCTV, 1965-70) was effectively an attempt to save the single drama from being axed by BBC1 because of poor ratings. In keeping with the discourses of social democracy which could most obviously be seen in the

television social documentaries of the time, many of these single dramas also began to deal with 'social issues' such as homelessness, single mothers and abortion. As I noted in Chapter 2, the issue of 'race conflict', as well as being a hot social affair by the 1960s, was also a key form of melodrama. Not surprisingly then, it too became a theme for **The Wednesday Play** (later to develop into **Play For Today**). Of course, these 'controversial' plays were born out of a BBC environment which was still organised around notions of objectivity established by the Royal Charter. However, drama, unlike news, documentary and current affairs, could, in the name of 'fiction', more easily dodge around some of those strict guidelines. The interventionist strategies employed by some dramatic writers however, laid their work open to claims of propaganda and political manipulation, especially given that so many of **The Wednesday Play's** did inadvertently champion the need for, or critique the arbitrariness of, specific social and political legislation.

b) CASE STUDY 1: Fable

John Hopkins' play **Fable** (BBC1, Tx:27.1.65) was screened as part of **The Wednesday Play** series. Although it was representative of the anti-establishment politics of many of the plays in the anthology, it also marked a radical use of form and content compared to the dominant representations of 'race' and hallmark of documentary realism hitherto deployed in race relations discourses. Although **Fable** was essentially an anti-apartheid project influenced by the establishment of Bantustans by the South African government, Hopkins set his play in a fantasy Britain. Here, the balance of apartheid was reversed, so that Blacks held political power and Whites were subjugated; Blacks were the master-majority and Whites the slave-minority. Hopkins says that it was not his aim to focus on racism or apartheid, but to, 'get the essence of a subject race that is ruled, exploited and violated by a ruling party' (quoted in

Pines, 1992:94). **Fable** therefore, was essentially about power, not about race. Nevertheless,

some thought it would be too disturbing for viewers to see 'Whiteness' represented as a

slavish identity (there were threats of fire-bombs if the BBC decided to go ahead with the

screening). Although the play made oblique reference to continuing repressive legislation in

South Africa, it also held currency in mid-1960s Britain, when race-related legislation was

being issued in unprecedented ways (see Chapter 1). Given the emerging discourse of anti-

immigration, and the fact that White Britons were being encouraged (through 'numbercentric'

documentary programmes, anti-immigration legislation, and panic-merchants such as Enoch

Powell) to fear Black people on an individual (culturally alien, troublemakers) and large-scale

(swamping, overcrowding, unemployment) basis, there were concerns that **Fable** would

inevitably 'stir up' racial tension. In addition, because of its apparent correspondence and

proximity to the 1965 Leyton by-election in which race was a central issue, the screening was

delayed by one week and thus received a considerable amount of pre-publicity which naturally

got it a higher than average (fourteen) percentage of viewers (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh,

1997:252).

Fable made brilliant use of Black acting talent in Britain and of visualising the abuse of power,

apartheid and control. It focused on the fate of a White couple, Len (Ronald Lacey) and his

wife Joan (Eileen Atkins) as the 'victims' of this inverted political setting. Amongst its Black

actors were Barbara Assoon, Dan Jackson, Carmen Munroe, Thomas Baptiste and Bari

Johnson. The drama was overlaid with imaginary news footage, commentary and photographs

to create a realistic sense of the new social order. Despite the realistic way in which the

imagined scenario was produced, the fictitious nature of the parable was clearly signposted

through the title (**Fable**) and closing sentence ("There are stories and there are things that

happen. This is a story. Things like this don't happen. They couldn't and if they did...". In

envisaging a world in which the dominant racial power relations were transposed, the play

revealed the vulnerability of racial and political identities and unsettled 'common-sense'

notions around race (as a permanent, biological construct rather than a social one). It was not

an 'easy' drama, and in taking the viewers on an imaginative voyage, invited them to think

through an illusory scenario in order to be reminded that racial discrimination is based on

conceptual differentiations which manifest themselves in a political sense.[7] Carmen Munroe

says that for the actors themselves, 'it was actually very frightening...because suddenly you

were being asked to perform the sort of acts that were performed against you in real life'

(quoted in Pines, 1992:58).

Where 'socially responsible' documentaries and naturalist dramas of this period such as **A

Man From The Sun** (1956) and **The Negro Next Door** (1965) tended to empty racism of its

political meaning by focusing on the personal dynamics of discrimination, **Fable** acknowledged

the institutional, political and social contexts in which (racist) power is manifested and, in so

doing, connected the personal with the political. At a time when Black characters were notable

for their absence in televisual dramatic narratives and where Whiteness was posed as a social

norm, **Fable** also questioned otherwise taken-for-granted ideas of what Black and White

ethnicities (both in a political sense and in terms of characterisation - the murderers, pimps and

prostitutes were White here) necessarily constitute. In granting subjectivity to the otherwise

under-represented, **Fable** also encouraged an upheaval in the viewers' normal relations of

looking by obliging the viewer to see Black people where usually only Whites were ever seen.

In this sense, it served, almost uniquely, as an early illustration of how television could

reconceptualise the typical ways of representing race and race relations. **Fable** acted as a

forceful demonstration of the fact that the system of representing the Black-British experience in terms of tone, format and characterisation, was not fixed in any one way.

But just as **Has Britain Got A Colour Bar?** (1955) raised hostile criticism that the programme-makers were 'siding' with Black Britons and **Till Death Us Do Part** was widely perceived as supporting, not criticising racist values, so **Fable** prompted a number of alternative responses to those intended by Hopkins. For some White British viewers who had, to date, only seen Black-British people on television as light entertainment stars, athletes or as the anthropological subjects of social documentaries (thus in mostly non-threatening roles), the image of themselves as subservient to Black people was deeply disturbing. In a BBC Audience Research Report, many of those interviewed about the programme stated, 'it's time there was something done on this problem' (BBC WAC Ref:T5/1,348 -*Fable*, 12.2.65). Instead of seeing the drama as a general condemnation of racial prejudice, some viewed the programme as a warning that Black power or even racial equality, might lead to the disenfranchisement of White people. This response, of course, cannot be disassociated from the increasing tones of fear which were circulating around Black people during the 1960s (see Chapter 2). At this level, Hopkins' project grossly misfired - fear not compassion being triggered in many viewers. **Fable** revealed amongst other things, 'the danger of misinterpretation inherent in dramatic attempts to intervene in sociopolitical policy' (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh, 1997:252). Thomas Baptiste, who played Mark Fellows (a liberal academic who was part of 'the movement' which did not believe in the oppression of White people) in **Fable**, received a letter after the broadcast warning, 'How dare you appear on our television screens, even as a friend or a liberal. Get back to your country! Hideous ape!' (Quoted in Pines, 1992:67.)

Section 2: 1970s - Mid 1980s - The Barren Patch[8]

Although Black characters became more commonplace in television drama in the 1970s, the

range of roles was generally limited to a set of narrow types. When Black people were

consciously written into scripts, it was usually in the context of dramatic conflict because of

the problems their colour was assumed to bring (e.g. the White girl bringing home a Black

boyfriend, or the problem of a mixed marriage as in the 'Armchair Theatre' presentation, **The**

World In A Room, ITV, Tx:22.6.70 which starred Nina Baden-Semper). In this sense, the

Black televisual presence in drama was often about a Black person's colour, rather than about

their character. One key pattern (long familiar to us from American cinema) which began to

emerge in the 1970s, was of Black characters in 'service' roles; as nurses, chauffeurs, waiters,

hospital orderlies, and so on. Black people were often included, as Munroe puts it, to "dress

the set" (Munroe, speaking at the National Film Theatre, 20.2.96). Of course, within the

political context of mounting pressure in Britain for more Black representation, this made it

look as though Black people had been included in the drama, although their roles were rarely

developed into 'characters' or written in interesting ways. Narrative film-maker, Alrick Riley,

who began his career as a television (**Grange Hill, Scum**) and theatre actor (Mustapha

Matura's **Welcome Home Jacko**) at around this time, says that, 'One of the reasons I got out

of acting was because I was always playing muggers and thieves. *But* the point wasn't that I

was playing muggers and thieves, it was the way these muggers and thieves were written. And

the way they were represented...it's not what you do, but how you do it' (Riley, *Black Film*

Bulletin, Summer 1994, Vol 2, Issue 2:6). Hence, the veneer of multicultural casting was

achieved by using Black characters, although essentially they remained peripheral to the

narrative. The move towards supposed 'integrated casting' was also influenced by the new

stream of imports arriving from America in which there was a more obvious Black presence

(Bill Cosby in **I Spy**, Greg Morris in **Mission Impossible** (1966-73), Nichelle Nichols (Lt. Uhura) in **Star Trek** (1966-69)).

Some actors like Carmen Munroe and Norman Beaton (who had started their careers in classical theatre), began to be offered television parts in the 1970s, but Munroe has spoken about her low morale explicitly as a result of what she saw as the creative low-point of the early to late 1970s. A few years earlier she had been performing in dynamic theatre productions such as Alun Owen's **There'll Be Some Changes Made** (1969), Jean Genet's **The Blacks** (1970) and George Bernard Shaw's **The Apple Cart** (1970). Although Munroe went on to appear in television dramas such as Barry Reckord's **In The Beautiful Caribbean** (1972), **Ted** (1972) and **Shakespeare Country** (1973), considering that she had been a professional actress for many years, the rewards were scarce. Munroe, who received her Equity card in 1962, recalls, "we [Black actors] were constantly trying to raise the levels of expectation...there was always this feeling that we were playing this catch-up game" (Munroe, speaking at the NFT, 20.2.96; my addition). She says, 'there was an emptiness, a feeling that I had come to a very, very low point. I thought if I'm not going to be able to work at what I really want to do, then there's not much point even in living' (quoted in Pines, 1992:62).

While the 1970s can be considered as a pivotal and productive moment in terms of those campaigns mounting around the issue of Black representation and access (see Chapters 1 and 3), the types of images which were being seen on-screen (particularly in comedy, light entertainment and drama) were severely limited. The sporadic nature of Black representation in television drama up to the latter part of the 1970s meant that there was no ongoing presence of Black television characters and no regular television work for most Black writers or actors.

This 'barren patch' can be attributed to a number of factors. First, there was, as I have already

mentioned, a large degree of discrimination against Black actors both in general and with regard

to the types of roles they could play. Secondly, for some Black people who sought media

work, the reality of television's racism had now begun to set in - and radical journalism was

generally considered as a more utilitarian and less restricted space in which to address the issue

of Black representation. This is not to say that *all* Black media work was reactive, race-related

or documentary-based but drama was generally more inaccessible - a White preserve. Of

course, this emphasis on documentary and journalism was not only a matter of personal

preference but also intimately related to expectations of the type of work Black writers, artists

and directors could produce; a criteria which Farrukh Dhondy has argued was partially

perpetuated by Black writers themselves in what he has described as 'political mafiaism'.

This, he suggests, is the pressure on Black writers to believe that, 'the only thing you ought to

write about is something that will help race relations, or something that will 'represent'

somebody' (quoted in Pines, 1992:171).

a) Black Characterisation in British Soap Operas - Phase One

I have, throughout this study, contested the notion that representation is antithetical to or

stands apart from 'real life'. One dramatic form which brings this issue to the fore is soap

opera. While soap operas have dominantly been packaged as mass entertainment of the most

superficial kind (see Gledhill in Hall, 1997:337-386), they are also supposedly based on

representations of 'the real'. It is precisely because of their mass popularity and strong

impetus to represent reality, that the question of how they represent race and race relations

can be considered as so important. Initially devised to attract lower-middle class, urban

viewers (most notably with the launch of **Coronation Street** in 1960), British soap operas

have traditionally been grounded in reflecting a version of reality with a focus on social concerns. British soaps organise their characters within socially well-defined local settings but are also located within a wider social structure and appear keen to represent strong and authentic national and social characteristics (for example, pub culture, class differentiations, regional dialects). This kind of local realism is a feature of soaps in particular but is, in any case, a feature of British drama in general. The essence of a successful soap is familiarity and repetition. It requires its own slot in the schedules, a core stock of character-types, internal crises, resolutions and long continuities with subtle alterations to ensure a 'hooked' audience.

In terms of the early history of Black characterisation in British soap operas, there were a few, usually misfired, attempts to integrate Black characters into the storylines. ITV's first long-running twice-weekly series was a hospital drama, **Emergency - Ward 10** (ATV/ITV, 1956-67) and featured both Carmen Munroe (from 1966) and Joan Hooley (who later became a script-writer on **Desmond's** and from August, 1998, began to appear in **Eastenders**). Hooley starred as Dr. Louise Mahler, a trainee house-surgeon in Oxbridge General Hospital who had come to England from Africa. Her role in the popular drama however, was short-lived. This was largely as a result of the 'controversial' storyline of Mahler falling in love with her White fellow doctor, Giles Farmer (John White). When it came to a proposed scene where the couple were meant to kiss in the bedroom, the press began to kick up a fuss about the 'unsuitability' of the scene in peak-time viewing. The Channels' authorities decided to compromise by reconstructing the scene as a gentle kiss in a garden. It is of course interesting that the television authorities reacted to press complaints and, in this way, admitted their own doubts and fears about miscegenation. Alongside this, came the implicit assumption that television was somehow 'ahead' of or more progressive than its audience, when the reality was that

inter-racial couples were already very much part of British social life. Hooley (herself married

to a White man) was soon written out of the series after her character was bitten by a snake.

Up to the 1970s, most British soap operas, despite their realistic facade, refused to concede its

substance, by avoiding what they considered as 'contentious' issues such as 'race'. In answer

to criticisms that Black characters were under-represented, programme-makers sometimes

defended their decision on the grounds that a Black narrative presence would not 'reflect

reality' or that it would somehow disrupt the 'White reality' being shown. Thus H.V.

Kershaw, an early script-writer on Britain's 'leading soap', **Coronation Street** (ITV,

Tx:9.12.60-), argued that:

> in keeping faith with our existing characters, we would again be forced to put
>
> unhelpful comments into the mouths of fictional men and women who
>
> command a wide following among the serial's millions of viewers with
>
> potentially dangerous effect. It is far easier to inflame the extremists with
>
> fictional support for their beliefs than to awaken the consciences of the
>
> uncaring with fictional moralities and it would be quite wrong, however
>
> strong well-meaning bodies may urge us to do so, for an entertainment
>
> programme to run such risks and accept such responsibility. (Kershaw,
>
> 1981:170-1)

Kershaw's argument supposed that Black characters *had* to be controversial, a problem or

representative of trouble in some form. He made a number of further assumptions about the

series and its audience: that the show's popular characters would *have* to be offensive to Black

characters; that a Black narrative presence would necessarily upset rather than enhance

storylines, not to mention his undermining the intelligence and ethnic diversity of **Coronation**

Street's millions of viewers.[9] The earliest appearance by a Black actor in **Coronation Street,**

was Thomas Baptiste who played Johnny Alexander, a wrongfully-sacked bus conductor

(Tx:7-23.1.63). Despite Baptiste's contribution to the soap and his position as the first Black

actor to break into Britain's leading drama, Baptiste was overlooked in **Coronation Street's**

thirtieth anniversary celebrations in 1990. He says of this omission, 'It was as though I didn't

exist; and for me it was also a corruption of history...The fact is, I worked on an important

soap like **Coronation Street** and, years later, there's no recall, no history or

acknowledgement of my work' (quoted in Pines, 1992:65).

In 1974, a report by Equity's Coloured Artists Committee criticised the lack of Black

representation in soap operas (*Coloured Artists on British Television,* August 1974). It was

rare, even up to the mid-1970s, to see depictions of 'Black-Britishness' in British soap operas.

There were exception such as Carmen Munroe, who played Sister Washington in **General**

Hospital (ATV/ITV, 1972-79) and Cleo Sylvestre (who appeared in Ken Loach's **Up The**

Junction (Tx:3.11.65) and **Cathy Come Home** (16.11.66)). Cleo Sylvestre also appeared in

Coronation Street in 1966 and two years later, in **Crossroads** (ITV, 1964-88) as Melanie

Harper, Meg Richardson's adopted daughter. **Crossroads**, although much-derided, had a better

track record than the other soaps in introducing Black characters into mainstream drama. In

November 1974, Trevor Butler was cast as Winston James and Elisabeth Adare played his

sister, Linda. Other Black characters included a motel receptionist, Rashida Malik (Sneh

Gupta), Dorothy Brown as a sports instructor and Ashok Kumar as Ranjit. One of

Crossroads' more durable Black characters was garage mechanic Joe MacDonald (Mac).

Although the soap wrote in an Asian family (the Chaudris) in August 1977, their main

storyline reiterated the stereotypical one of the Asian family struggling because of their

cultural difference. The story was based on the conflict between Meena Chaudri (Karan David)

and her parents (played by Renu Setna and Jamila Massey) over Meena's relationship with a

White man, Dennis. As if further confirmation was needed of this recurring theme, a few years

earlier the series **Marked Personal** not only depicted the same theme (irrational

father/oppressed daughter) but also used the same actors (Karan David and Renu Setna). Over

a decade later (February 1989) there was a similar storyline in **Eastenders** where school-girl

Shireen (Nisha Kapur) had to deal with her father's (Pavel Douglas as Mantel) opposition to

her relationship with White neighbour Ricky. Concurrently, the same storyline could be seen

in **Brookside**, where Nisha (Sunetra Sarker, who went on to play Jyoti in **London Bridge**,

1997) was battling with her parents (played by Mohammed Ashiq and Jamila Massey) over

her English friends (see Daniels and Gerson, 1989:119-129). This striking recycling of the same

theme, characters and actors, as well as demonstrating a stunning lack of imagination, meant

that, for over two decades, 'Asianness' in British soap operas was reduced to a single thematic

meaning.

At this stage, I want to signal a few general problems with Black characterisation in the genre.

First, we have seen the creation of very few 'complete' Black families in British soaps. Given

that the family is the primary setting of the soap and all conflicts which arise have this as their

principal narrative stake, our interest in the well-being of the family nexus is pivotal to our

involvement both with the serial and with individual family members. Secondly, an obvious

tension over 'how to create a Black character' has meant that more effort appears to have been

targeted towards that, than in how to create a dramatically engaging character. Black characters

have tended to be formulated around issues, rather than personality, and this has served to

detract interest once the issue has been resolved or is no longer of narrative interest. This has

made the Black character easily 'disposable' from the serial. Thirdly, the para-texts around

soap operas (for example, magazines, tie-ins and chat shows) which play an integral part in how viewer interest and pleasure is developed, have rarely related to Black soap characters.

Certain breakthroughs were made with **Empire Road** (BBC, Tx:31.10.78-28.11.78 (1st series), 23.10.79-25.10.79 (2nd series)), the first British television series to be conceived and written by a Black writer (Michael Abbensetts) for a Black cast and about the Black-British experience.[10] Set in the Birmingham suburb of Handsworth and specifically about the British-Caribbean experience, it included a South Asian and West Indian cast and dealt with a number of issues including Black on Black prejudice (through the relationship of Ranjanaa Kapoor (Nalini Moonasar) and Marcus Bennett (Wayne Laryea)). More tragicomic moments were provided in the relationship between Marcus' father, Everton Bennett (played by Norman Beaton) and his brother-law Walter. Where **Empire Road** was arguably less successful, was with its Black women characters. Although the character of Ranjanaa was individualised, she was still caught in the familiar plight of overbearing father/disapproved of boyfriend. Corinne Skinner-Carter who played Hortense Bennett in the series, criticised Abbensetts' portrayal of her character, complaining, 'I've always accused him of being a male chauvinistic pig. The women in **Empire Road** are passive. I'm only there because Norman must have a wife - because if he wants a cup of coffee he can't make it for himself!' (Skinner-Carter, *The Radio Times*, 23.8.79).

Pre-publicity for **Empire Road** stressed how, while the programme might essentially be Black, it also aimed to amuse and entertain (in order to attract a wider audience), rather than be heavy and political (see Daniels & Gerson, 1989:130-146). But the first series of **Empire Road** was not done any favours by being scheduled at 6.50 p.m. (the Further Education Slot on BBC2).

Although the second series was moved to 8 p.m. peak-time and the actors were clearly

committed to the series (Norman Beaton said 'it was perhaps the best television series that I

have been in) (quoted in Daniels and Gerson, 1988:132), **Empire Road** was axed after two

short series.[11] Horace Ove directed three out of ten episodes in the second series and believes

that he got more out of the cast precisely because he too is Black (Trinidadian). He says,

'When West Indian actors go on television they react, and clean up their accents, and lose out

on their rhythm and style. English directors will tend to suggest English motivations to them,

and they create something else out of it' (quoted in Daniels & Gerson, 1988:135). Although

Ove had worked extensively in film and documentary since the 1960s, he says that he was

treated with distinct scepticism when he worked on the series. He recounts:

> ...people were always on my back, trying to tell me what I already knew.
> And half the time the people who were telling me what to do had no
> knowledge of film-making whatsoever. They were administrators who knew
> how to run things from the top, but they didn't know anything about making
> a film...I constantly had to deal with those kinds of problems, and it came
> from my being the first West Indian director, which did and still does make
> people in the business nervous. (Quoted in Pines, 1992:125)

b) CASE STUDY 2 : Rewriting History - The Jewel In The Crown

> The West had to reshape the Orient in order to comprehend it; there was a
> sustained effort to devise in order to rule. (Rana Kabbani, 1986:138)

In a lot of post-war imagery, we have seen a yearning to intrude on the discourses of history in

order to reinvent a usable past. Historical drama has often been proclaimed as history reflected

in narrative form, although there is nothing natural about this aspect of representation. Certain

decisions inevitably have to be made both in terms of the text itself (for example, which

historical moment to represent, from who's viewpoint, who to cast and in which type of roles) and in terms of extra-textual factors (how much money to invest in the production, how the drama is pitched, scheduled etc). All these factors influence how the text is produced, viewed and interpreted, and shape *how* and *what* we come to know of the past. Historical narratives have been a dominant mode of British drama and play a central role in formations of national identity; we are invited, as a nation, to remember - but only certain things and only in certain ways.[12] In this sense, television acts as agent, both erasing and reconstructing our sense of the past. A recurrent preoccupation in the so-called 'heritage texts' has been demise of Empire and the days of the British Raj, but these have rarely been told from a Black viewpoint.[13]

The Jewel In The Crown (Granada/ITV, Tx:91.1.84-3.4.84), a fourteen-part series of fifteen hours, has repeatedly been looked back on as a landmark drama representing what Charlotte Brunsdon has described as the 'acme of British quality' (Brunsdon, 1990:85). The serial promised an authentic portrait (through the use of Pathe newsreels and its choice of costumes, mise-en-scene, etc) of the melancholic twilight years of the British Raj (1935-60). Critical and popular opinion of the series highlighted how dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings can be made from the same text (Morley, 1992). General responses were mostly ones of praise, which discussed the drama in terms of authenticity, quality and 'fairness'.[14] For many, the series was viewed as anti-imperialist and reflective of modern, liberal values. Dr Joy Cameron in *The Scotsman* argued that, 'Knocking the British Empire is now a trendy thing to do', (2.2.84:10). Lucy Hughes-Hallet, meanwhile, suggested that **Jewel** showed, 'a constant awareness of the other side to every question...However interested we might be in the touching, tongue-tied courtship going on in the drawing-room, there was still time for the camera to show us the servant asleep outside' (*The Standard*, 10.1.84:23). Of course the fact

that the camera showed 'the other side' said nothing of *what* it showed and did not in itself,
guarantee a 'balanced' portrayal of colonial rule. By contrast, Salman Rushdie argued that
Jewel represented a surge of imperialistic nostalgia during the early years of Thatcherism in
which it was produced. Richard Dyer suggested that, while the serial was implicitly racist, it
was in opposition to the 1980s climate of political Conservatism. He suggested that, 'the
liberalism of the series is revealed in the way it sets up as villains [notably Ronald Merrick
who is the only character to last the fourteen parts] those who speak in the language of
Thatcherism' (Dyer, 1997:196; my addition).

In my opinion, Jewel In The Crown crystallised the contradictory position of a lot of British
dramas and social documentaries up to this point. On the one hand, it was classically liberal
(appearing to address a race issue and include Black characters), while on the other, it
dominantly excluded a significant Black narrative presence. The trick of the series was, of
course, how it managed to locate itself within the ideologies of liberalism whilst also doing
virtually nothing to tell us anything oppositional, challenging or otherwise about a silenced
colonial experience. Television, as we have repeatedly seen, is actively involved in the process
of cultural selection and exclusion (or what James Snead has called 'marking' and 'omission',
1994). Narrative meaning is shaped as much by absences, as by what is represented. Ironically,
although the serial acknowledged that Indians were restrained by the British, the text itself
silenced Indian perspectives. The majority of Indians in the serial served as little more than
'atmosphere artistes', as native backdrop to White privilege, opulence and order (thus not
being far removed from the early set of Empire films in the 1930s and 1940s). At the same
time, Jewel appeared to be working towards redressing the imbalance of other 'return to
empire' texts which more explicitly privileged the White viewpoint (textually, structurally and

in modes of production e.g. very few Black actors). In terms of this liberalism, it is worth asking liberal to whom, by whose standards and in comparison to what? **Jewel** was certainly hooked up in these liberal complexities.

The serial pandered to notions of liberalism through its depiction of the crueller side of colonial rule (particularly in the character of Ronald Merrick played by Tim Pigott-Smith) and by drawing us towards its central female characters, Daphne Manners and Sarah Layton, the symbolic bearers of the 'civilising mission'. Female Whiteness serves as the liberal (albeit powerless) voice. Its representatives 'express disapproval of British practice in India, though always at the level of how Indians are treated rather than whether they should be treated at all; they criticise the conduct of empire, not the enterprise itself' (Dyer, 1997:186). Daphne, the heroine of **Jewel In The Crown**, functioned as the archetypal Liberal, not only because she was constantly filmed smiling at servants, eating Indian food and educating others about Indian history (she told Hari the story behind the Bibighar Gardens), but because she chose to become romantically involved with Hari, her racial Other. 'Flirting with the other' however, proved to be fatal. Not only was this English Rose 'a decent sort', but she was raped; not only was she raped but gang-raped; not only raped by Indians, but by peasants, 'so class as well as sex is violated' (Rushdie, 1988:131). Daphne's rape by nameless Indians was more symbolic however, not only in narrative terms (much rested on the build-up and repercussions of the incident) but because it came just after she had 'crossed the boundary' with Hari. The Daphne/Hari relationship also played on the central role of nostalgia in **Jewel**; not just British nostalgia for empire or the days of the Raj, but also for the reappearance of Hari and Daphne who disappeared (although they were of central narrative concern throughout) from the text after only a few episode (Daphne died and Hari was imprisoned).[15]

Richard Dyer has noted not only how Jewel 'draws us into a specifically female chain of signification' (in terms of its connection to the soap opera form, liberalism, symbolic points of reference etc.) (Dyer, 1997:193), but that it also makes this an unequivocally White space. It was always through Whiteness that the Indian characters functioned, and almost always the White spaces to which viewers were drawn. The only significant Indian female characters were Lili Chatarghee (Daphne's 'Aunt') and the Maharanee (Jamila Massey) (Episode 8 'An Evening at the Maharanees'), a rich, arrogant intolerable woman. The two leading Indian men, Hari Kumar (Art Malik) and Ahmed Kassim (Derrick Branche) essentially 'worked' narratively through Daphne and Sarah (Daphne and Hari were lovers, Sarah and Kassim 'good friends'), and it was the White women who held narrational authority. Daphne and Sarah were privileged 'as listeners, observers and questioners' and 'provide[d] the perspective on other characters and events' (Dyer, 1997:191-2; my addition). Ella Shohat has described how the shifting of subject positions functions in colonial texts where, 'the Western woman character, usually the object of the male gaze in Hollywood films, tends to be granted in the East an active (colonial) gaze, insofar as she now, temporarily within the narrative, becomes the sole delegate, as it were, of Western civilisation (Shohat, 1991:63). Indeed, we can see through Jewel's White female characters that the traditional gender balance is inverted, while the dominant race relations are sustained.

Jewel allowed no narrative space for the Indians/the colonised to be liberal about Britishness. Thus, the text upheld the 'fantasy that the Other who is subjugated, who is subhuman, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the workings of the powerful' (hooks, 1992:168). Jewel glossed over the psychic and political complexities of British/Indian

relations in favour of a yarn about eye-patched counts, charitable missionaries and torn young women fluctuating between desire and loathing. The series made it difficult for the viewer to comprehend the Raj through the eyes of the colonised because of the sheer sparsity of Indian characters. India was held at arm's length - functioning as absence, exteriority and lack. The juxtaposition of Hari as the good (Anglicised) Indian with Merrick, the bad Briton, was not sufficient to sustain **Jewel** as a critique of British colonialism. Indeed, Hari was characterised in relation to his complex sameness and difference with Britishness, epitomised in his declaration, "I hate it - India. I hate all the beggars and the heat and the bugs, and most of all myself for being Black and English...I'm Indian, incapable of being anything except an Indian, something totally alien to me" (Hari, Episode 1). **Jewel** was not a critique of British imperial rule but an acknowledgement that it was sometimes difficult to implement with compassion. This struggle was best signified through the overwhelming sense of emptiness, stasis and hopelessness which resonated throughout the series. In this sense, the emptiness of the colonial project did come through. This was articulated most clearly by Guy Perron in the final episode; "What else could we have done?" to which Sarah replied, "Nothing - nothing we could do. It's like Daphne Manners - like Hari Kumar. After three hundred bloody years of India we've made this whole, damn, bloody, senseless mess" (Tx:3.4.84). **Jewel** functioned as a text which both excused (while claiming to explain) and simplified (while claiming to expand on) the colonial enterprise and, as such, acted as sedation prescribed to move but not, in any real sense, disturb the audience.

It is interesting to note that over a decade later, the BBC brought us the television serialisation of **Rhodes** (BBC1, Tx:15.9.96-3.11.96), a historical drama which actually lacked the complexities and liberal impulse of **Jewel**. Made in South Africa, with a budget of ten million

pounds (the highest costing drama serial for the BBC) this eight-part 'bio-series' aimed to

chart the life and times of British imperialist, Cecil J Rhodes (played by Martin Shaw). What

we were presented with however, was a very selected version of that history which ultimately

showed Rhodes as a liberal, rather than ruthless coloniser. As such, **Rhodes** functioned as a

heroisation of a brutal colonial figure and reproduced national mythologies related to the

colonial project. Whilst the fundamental tension in how to reconstruct historical narratives was

apparent in **Jewel**, **Rhodes** simply presented its main character as an adventurer, a pioneer of

modern Africa. For the BBC to have invested such huge sums of (our) money on the

production and to justify it by declaring, "He shaped the destiny of a continent" while saying

nothing of *how* he shaped Africa, demonstrated how **Rhodes** was bent towards both

romanticising and mythifying the colonial experience. As well as adopting all the formal

costume-drama clichés (flashbacks, dusty settings, silent Blacks, a cursory princess), **Rhodes**

crudely foregrounded the coloniser's viewpoint. We were told virtually nothing about 'native'

opposition to him. As Colin Clark argued, 'Antony Thomas's script takes a *Boys Own* view of

Rhodes, lacking both objectivity, and any trace of modern thinking...it is astonishing that the

BBC should gloss over his disgusting and often unethical behaviour' (Clark, *Punch*, 14-

20.9.96:83).[16]

Section 3: Mid 1980s - 1990s - 'Multiculturalising' British TV Drama

While the single-play structure of early drama might have suited new Black writers, the lack of

access at that time meant that they could not take full advantage of it. By the time

breakthroughs were being made, the structural drift towards the series/serials format of TV

genres, had begun to set in. In addition, the room for experimentation which was available

within the emerging independent workshop sector greatly contrasted with the counter-trend of

more package-oriented programming which was occurring in television. In short, during the

1970s, you were more likely to see a Black artist working on a one-off experimental film than

on a television drama series. The dominant replacement of single documentaries/dramas by the

series form had the general effect of closing television off to those considered inexperienced in

delivering popular television, or work that did not 'fit' with the identity of the series. The

investment entailed in launching and producing a new series meant that few 'risks' were being

taken (particularly in the new four-channel competitive system) so that drama became a

significant exclusion zone for many Black artists who were still dominantly viewed as ratings-

risks.

Horace Ove and Michael Abbensetts (who had worked together on **Empire Road**) were

virtually the only two Black writers/directors in relatively frequent television work at this

time. Michael Abbensetts' early plays included **The Museum Attendant** (BBC2, Tx:2.8.73),

Inner City Blues (Granada/ITV, Tx:2-4.8.75; part of **Crown Court**), **Crime and Passion**

(Granada/ITV, Tx:7-9.1.76; part of **Crown Court**), **Black Christmas** (BBC2, Tx:20.12.77)

and **Roadrunner** (Thames/ITV, Tx:5.7.77) (for more on Abbensetts, see Malik in Newcomb,

1997:1-2). Horace Ove directed a number of dramas including **The Garland (Shai Mala**

Khani) (Play for Today, BBC1, Tx:10.3.81), **When Love Dies** (1989) (starring Josette

Simon and Brian Bovell) and **The Orchid House** (1991). He won the British Film Institute's

Independent Film and Television Award in 1986 'for his contribution to British film culture

through his pioneering films and television programmes on issues concerning black people'

(quoted in Pines, 1992:121). Ove's **A Hole in Babylon (Play for Today,** BBC, Tx:29.11.79)

was one of the few television dramas to tell a Black-related story and to have a predominantly

Black cast, production team and Black director. The film explored, in fictional form (intercut

with actual news footage), the lives and politics of the three young Black men involved in the Spaghetti House siege in 1975. Ove recalls how, despite repeated requests for the film rights from the US, the BBC refused, and one sales executive at the BBC said, "We are not going to sell a film abroad about a group of black hooligans!" Other exceptional television dramas of the time included Mustapha Matura's **Nice** (Channel 4, Tx:27.11.84) which featured an award-winning dramatic monologue by Norman Beaton. Abbensetts' **Black Christmas** (BBC2, Tx:20.12.77) was another moving piece, based on a Black womans' (Carmen Munroe as Gertrude) attempt to make her family's Christmas run smoothly. Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecehta, was notable as one of the few Black women TV writers of the time - she wrote **The Ju-Ju Landlord** (Granada TV/ITV, Tx:3-5.3.76; part of **Crown Court**) and **Nigeria (A Kind of Marriage)** (BBC2, Tx:29.5.76; part of **Centre Play: Commonwealth Season**). Like many of the Black-produced dramas of this time, Henry Martin's **Big George Is Dead** (Channel 4, Tx:1.10.87) privileged a Black male viewpoint. Written by Abbensetts and starring Rudolph Walker as Tony and Norman Beaton as Boogie, **Big George Is Dead** was particularly interesting in its portrayal of the London scene, generational difference and the mythical quality of 1980s Soho (see Martin's interview with Malik, 16.5.96).

Preethi Manuel's analysis of more than 600 drama productions on British television in 1984 examined the types of drama and roles in which Asian and African-Caribbean actors were cast. The research found that only 2.3% of actors cast were Black and that the majority of Black characters were only seen in a narrow range of roles such as violent criminals, school pupils, garage-mechanics, nurses and almost always as working-class. Meanwhile, the casting of Whites was found to be diverse in terms of background, age, class, occupation and so on. No complete 'traditional' Black family was seen; children under twelve and the elderly were rarely

on-screen. There were also few signs of integrated casting and Blacks were rarely depicted in caring relationships with each other and usually characterised as violent, mixed-up or hostile (Manuel, 1986).[17] I would add to Manuels' observations, that Black people in television drama up to this point, were almost always characterised according to their 'race'. For example, Black characters were almost always reactive or bound by discrimination, as if that was the 'truth' of their lives. While certain initiatives were being made in other areas of broadcasting (in the name of 'equal opportunity' and 'multiculturalism') the results of Manuel's study were testament to the fact that Blacks were still limited in where they were and were not seen in television drama.

Many, however, were no longer prepared to tolerate tokenistic or stereotypical Black images in drama and thus debates around casting, representation and stereotypes became increasingly vocal, and later in the 1980s, more directly focused on television drama.[18] Because of the possibilities of predetermining how to construct character and themes in drama, the genre was considered a critical (albeit restricted) site for its renegotiation. One drama which focused some of these critical debates (around positive and negative images, realism, authorship, and so on) was the four-part serial **King Of The Ghetto** (BBC2, Tx:1.5-22.5.86). The series alluded to topical political settings for some 'real life' British Asians in London's East End and purported to fictionalise a version of their reality. This laid the text open to complaints of 'misrepresentation' and of creating a new set of stereotypes (e.g. corrupt Asian business men). Abdus Shukur of the Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisations resented the writer's (Farrukh Dhondy) assumption that he understood the politics of the East End Bangladeshi Community on which the serial was based. He argued that Dhondy,

> does not come from the community, and he doesn't understand it, which is
> why **King of The Ghetto** misrepresents us so badly. And why did he make

us look so thick? In one scene, a Bangladeshi woman was being shown how
to use a teapot. Bengal is one of the biggest tea-producing regions in the
world. Don't you think a woman from there would know how to use a
bloody teapot? (Shukur, *The Sunday Times*, 11.6.86)

The fundamental question of Black authorship reappeared here. For years, Black people had

been used to having their lives narrated, almost without exception, by White, middle-class men.

And while the 1980s were widely considered as successful in terms of gaining access (i.e. we

were beginning to see more Black writers), it was now being cruelly realised that Black

authorship, in itself, carries no guarantees. What it did hold, for the producers of those images,

was a 'burden of representation', the sense that any Black-produced work had to solve all the

problems of Black representation at once and had to match up with a particular version of

'reality' against which all representations could be tested (Mercer, 1994:81). The expectations

of Black writers and producers were much higher, because they were expected to 'get it right',

although there was no 'right' that could be agreed upon. Many of those who criticised **King of**

the Ghetto, resented the implication that it was White liberal 'missionaries' (represented by

Matthew, an ex-skinhead played by Tim Roth and his partner, Sadie played by Gwyneth

Strong) who essentially organised and politicised the Bengali community, thus overlooking

Bengali-initiated political movements such as those witnessed around the trials of the Newham

8 and Bradford 12 in the early 1980s (see Fatima Salaria's article in *Artrage*, Issue 17, 1987).

King of The Ghetto's portrayal of Asian women was also criticised (particularly Nasreen

played by Shelley King) as was its focus on the corruption within Bengali community

leadership. While the two hundred Bangladeshi's from London's Brick Lane who protested

about the serial outside BBC Television Centre (May 1986) were clearly outraged, the series

was acclaimed by others for breaking with stereotypes and for creating 'real characters, not

symbols' (*Radio Times*, 26.4-2.5, 1986). A major criticism of **King of The Ghetto** was that

Dhondy (who at this time was relatively new in his position as Channel 4's Multicultural

Editor) not only had too big a burden to represent the Black community 'responsibly', but

also held too much power in deciding which images of them to bring to screen.

If one series of this period broke that monopoly, it was **Black Silk** (BBC2, Tx:7.11.85-

26.12.85). The series starred Rudolph Walker as a Black barrister, Larry Scott, and also

featured a number of other Black actors including Mona Hammond and Suzette Llewellyn.

Devised by Mustapha Matura and Rudy Narayan and with the majority of the eight-part

series written by different Black writers (including Matura, Edgar White and Tunde Ikoli), its

themes were heavily focused, not on reinstating law and order (as in the conventional crime

genre), but on exposing it as routinely unjust. Storylines included a critique of British

Immigration Laws by fictionalising an Asian couple's experience of it, the problems involved

in black self defence in the British courts, and the Prevention of Terrorism Acts (Gardner, *The

Listener*, 31.10.85). Another notable series which brought a touch of contemporary realism to

the adventure/crime series while also subverting its traditional White, male dominance was

South of The Border (BBC1, Tx:25.10.88-13.12.88). This starred Buki Armstrong as Pearl

Parker, an ordinary Deptford citizen turned detective (Valentine Nonyela played her brother

Rufus and Corinne Skinner-Carter her mother Rose).

a) Blacks in British Soaps - Phase Two

By the mid-1980s, the importance of soap operas as part of everyday (television) culture had

become increasingly apparent when each of the four channels launched new soaps or 'spiced

up' their existing ones. Since then, the increasing prominence of the form in terms of the

schedule (most are now tri-weekly and some have an omnibus edition), pre-publicity and extra-textual interest has cemented them as a major cultural phenomenon. During the 1980s, a number of British soaps attempted to diversify their character-range and storylines by incorporating more Black characters and there were even experiments with Black-centred soaps. Granada Television's twice-weekly **Albion Market** (ITV, Tx:8.85-8.86) had an obvious multicultural cast, but it was axed after 100 episodes. Channel 4 launched the first British-Asian soap opera, **Family Pride** (Channel 4, 1991-3), and BBC2 recently produced **Brothers and Sisters** (1996) (starring songstress Patti Boulaye) as part of its late-night **The A-Force** package. With transmission times of around 4 p.m. and 12 a.m respectively, both of these undoubtedly suffered because of their marginal position in the schedules (although **Brothers and Sisters** was repeated on Sunday afternoons).

The BBC's leading soap opera, **Eastenders** (BBC1, Tx:2.85 -), has arguably done more than any of its rivals to include Black characters and storylines, but they have still largely remained peripheral to where the 'real' action is, or have been cast without a sense of permanency. There is still a sense that the Black characters are being force-fed into the plot rather than being a complementary or integral part of it. When **Eastenders** was launched, its producer Julia Smith, was keen to emphasise that the soap would be multicultural, deal with controversial issues and 'encompass stories about homosexuals, unemployment, racial prejudice etc. in a believable context' (Smith in Buckingham, 1987:16).[19] It has been well documented however, that many of the programme's Black characters left the series dissatisfied with the ways in which their characters or storylines were developed (Daniels & Gerson, 1988, Pines, 1992, Ross, 1996). Shreela Ghosh, who played shopkeeper Naima Jeffrey, saw the storyline involving her screen-husband Saeed's (played by Andrew Johnson) visit to prostitutes as a

slur on Asians and argued that her character was often made to say ignorant things. She said, 'I keep playing scenes week in, week out which have no substance...We're a political football for Julia Smith, a trump card over all the soaps' (Ghosh in Daniels & Gerson, 1988:128). Judith Jacobs (later to appear in **The Real McCoy**) who played health-worker Carmel, said, 'I've been so deeply offended and angered by the way **Eastenders** scriptwriters have treated black people that I was prepared to pack my job up if they refused to make the changes I asked for' (Jacobs, *News of The World,* 19.6.88) (see Pines, 1992 for extensive interviews with Jacobs and Paul J. Medford who played Kelvin Carpenter).[20] The irony, of course, was that many of these Black actors found themselves playing roles that they were actually critical of.

More recently, it has been apparent that **Eastenders'** script-writers have been trying to reject the obvious racial stereotypes on which the earlier set of Black characters were based. Ironically, this appears to have posed the dilemma of how to also keep the Black characters interesting. Of course, it is one of the soap's techniques to *make* the audience care, to familiarise us with its characters, to make us want to tune in to catch further developments. But in the case of many of **Eastenders'** Black characters (Jools, Blossom, Lenny, Mick, Lola), we have neither been forced nor encouraged to form a relationship with them. Although this is not something specific *only* to the Black characters, it is a characteristic which many of them share. The character of Blossom, for example (who was played by Mona Hammond, a RADA trained, leading Black actress) was endlessly seen serving cups of tea, but rarely took centre stage in the soap. **Eastenders'** longest-running Asian characters, Sanjay (Deepak Verma) and Geeta (Shobu Kapoor) who left the series in September 1998, are a prime example of how Black characters tend to be undeveloped in television soap-opera. Apart from a few of their more extensive storylines which occupied the crucial cliff-hanger ending (Geeta's IVF

treatment, Sanjay's affair with Geeta's sister, Meena (Sudha Buchar) and Geeta's

disappearance which led to Sanjay's murder-charge), they were rarely of central narrative

concern. More usually, they functioned as support for other characters' storylines (Geeta as a

narrative ear for Ruth and Cindy, there to buy somebody a drink in the Queen Vic, or seen

chatting in the market). They essentially acted as 'narrative donors', helping the 'real action'

come to fruition.[21] Unlike most soap characters, we were very rarely drawn into the 'private'

space of their home. Like **Eastenders'** first set of gay characters (Colin and Barry), Sanjay and

Geeta were not inter-related, in any real sense, to the other families in Albert Square.

Furthermore, the only thing that made Sanjay and Geeta 'authentically' Asian, was the fact

that they were peripheral to the soap's multi-strand structure! They never spoke an Asian

language, they were never seen eating Indian food, Geeta never wore Indian clothes; the fact of

their ethnicity was never acknowledged except in the form of a racist attack and this story

disappeared without trace (Tx:8.94). This is not to say that every Black character has to be

signposted as 'a Black character' but, given the level of familiarity that audiences are expected

to build with soap characters, Sanjay and Geeta's lifestyle and habits remained remarkably

unexplored.

Other soap operas such as the BBC's **Tiger Bay** (BBC1, Tx:14.7.96-1.9.96) and Carlton's

London Bridge (Carlton/ITV, 1996 -) have increasingly included an ethnically-mixed cast. In

fact, **London Bridge**, which is an early evening, twice-weekly soap (although only aired in the

London region) has regularly based its main plotline around its many Black characters.[22] More

importantly perhaps, is that the makers of **London Bridge** continue to bring in more and more

Black characters, thus demonstrating that they do not appear to be working to a quota-system

(i.e. that x amount of Black characters is 'enough'). Meanwhile, the eight-part **Tiger Bay** was

screened at peak-time and focused on the tension between 'old' and 'new' Wales. It starred

Suzanne Packer as Maria Monks (Packer previously played irresponsible mother Josie

Johnson, in **Brookside**). **Tiger Bay's** genuinely multicultural narrative and characterisation,

although reflective of the 'real-life' Tiger Bay's ethnic mix, looked strangely contrived on

screen ('the truth' has somehow become hard to imagine). Most of the leading soaps today,

have at least one 'permanent' Black character (Fiona Middleton[23] in **Coronation Street**,

although she has a White mother and her Black father only appeared briefly when she got

married) and some have been seen as part of entire Black families (Mick and Elaine Johnson in

Brookside, Sanjay and Geeta Kapoor in **Eastenders**). Brookside Close's longest-running

Black character, Mick Johnson, is particularly interesting. Although drawn as a 'nice guy' (a

hard-working, single-father), his main storylines have seen him teetering on the brink of

criminality although these are mostly as a result of his 'ethical' behaviour (e.g. self defence

against a female stalker, buying heroin for his cancer-ridden mother-in-law, Gladys, and

subsequently helping her to die in order to ease her pain). Meanwhile, some popular soaps,

and most obviously **Emmerdale** and **Coronation Street**, remain remarkably averse to

including Black characters. For a genre so committed to 'realism', the lack of Black characters

does, in fact, make these soaps appear quite unrealistic (if we consider, for example, that

Manchester, where **Coronation Street** is set, has a large Black population). **Coronation**

Street has been particularly resistant to Asian characters. The 'dissimilarity' of 'Asianness'

to the forces of 'English culture' are still clearly considered *too* different for the 'Nation's

Favourite' soap to handle.

b) Framing 'Blackness': The Television Crime Series

One of the commoner spaces in which Black characters and themes have featured, has been in

the crime series. For the purpose of this discussion, it is worth noting here those related images

of race and crime which have developed in other television genres (news, documentary). These,

I would argue are, in fact, interconnected to the ways in which they have been constructed in

drama. The dramatic realism of the (fictional) crime genre has often worked alongside the

dominant sense of realism constructed in other (factual) television genres. As such, we have

often seen Black people cast as villains, criminals or social deviants in order to add an

atmosphere of dread or a dominant sense of 'authenticity' (thus defensible because 'realistic',

according to what the news media tells us). If we take the classic media image of the Black

mugger, this has often been constructed as a 'Black crime', usually inflicted on helpless elderly

White women. As Preethi Manuel notes, in an edition of the female-led detective series **The**

Gentle Touch (LWT/ITV, Tx:27.7.84), the opening images depicted two boys (one White,

one Black) assaulting a White lady in a crowded street; but it was the Black teenager who

became the 'dominant performer and a whole series of signs and codes (contrasting dress, skin

colour) and syntagms ('purity', 'corruption')' reinforced the Black mugger stereotype

(Manuel, 1986:28).

Charlotte Brunsdon has suggested that, 'the crime series offers particular problems for the

representation of race if the production company wishes to move away from the stereotypical

presentation of black villains. The problem lies in the way in which the effect of realism is

created in a genre'. This 'effect of realism' is not dependent on an 'external' pre-given truth

(i.e. that Blacks are more likely to be villains), but on the 'internal' sense of realism produced

in other crime series and television genres (Brunsdon in Baehr & Dyer 1987:192). In this sense,

each TV genre constructs its own distinct codes, conventions and sense of realism, but the way

in which each genre develops this often corresponds to the reality which is produced in other

television genres. The Black mugger image, then, carries a particular mark of authenticity because news and documentary often associates this crime with Black people. It follows then that Black characters are rarely seen to be involved in White collar crimes and Asians are regularly cast as helpless victims of racist attacks (usually in their shops). Other crime genre clichés have included the shady Asian business-man, the fanatical Muslim father who snatches his children and takes them to Pakistan (Art Malik in **Stolen**, ITV, 1990) and Blacks as prostitutes and pimps (Bella in **Widows**, Ria in **The Sweeney**). The BBC series **Gangsters** (BBC1, 1976, 1978) made some breakthroughs, not only in being 'the first ever television series to have a Pakistani hero' (Rose, *The Radio Times,* 9.9.76) in undercover agent Khan (Ahmed Khalil), but also in its play with the conventions of the crime genre itself. Although its focus was on sensational (Black-associated) crimes such as drugs, gang violence, prostitution and immigrant smuggling, it based this in a quasi-fantasy criminal underworld which was depicted as both multicultural and exotic. The 'look' of multiculturalism here was not dull, dutiful or undynamic but exotic, stylised and, in some senses, threatening. To this degree, the series moved away from:1) the generic conventions of television crime fiction and the classic race relations discourse which tend to work within a realist aesthetic; and 2) the notion that Black people's lives are always based around 'truth'.[24]

Given the positive/negative framework and narrow character types on which the crime genre is based (the good cop, bad cop, victim, criminal), there have been a number of attempts to challenge the dominant cultural alignment between Blackness and criminality. The Black character has often been switched from the 'wrong' to the 'right' side of the law. But many of these characterisations have, I would argue, been set up as *exceptional* and atypical types; the novelty is to be found in their non-criminality (thus the *good black* cop, the *Chinese detective,*

the successful *black lawyer*. The collective code of the crime genre has traditionally been concerned with reinstating moral order and it is here that the creation of a Black hero has also come in useful, because s/he is required to liaise with 'the Black community'. This device has been used in many dramas, including **Prime Suspect 2, Bombay Blue, The Bill** and GF Newman's **Black and Blue** (BBC1, Tx:20.9.92).[25] In addition, when a virtuous Black is created (a police officer or detective for example) s/he is usually juxtaposed with a more typical (villainous) Black character or community. Jim Pines has used the example of **Wolcott** (ATV/ITV, Tx:13-15.1.81) (which cast the lead Black character as a police-hero) to illustrate the argument that the image of a Black representative of the law is not necessarily a 'positive' image or one that breaks from other stereotypes (Pines in Daniels & Gerson, 1989:63-70). Indeed, the pre-publicity for **Wolcott** played directly into the image of hyper-Black masculinity, announcing, 'He's Big. He's Black. In his own unequivocal terms, he's a 'classy dude...and he is Britain's first black television detective to get a show of his own - our answer to Sidney Poitier' (Hall, *TV Times,* 1981). Despite such broad claims, **Wolcott** was not extended after its pilot (it was intended to follow with a thirteen-part series). Written by Americans (Barry Wasserman and Patrick Carroll) but set in Britain (Hackney), **Wolcott** starred George William Harris as an East End policeman, Winston Churchill Wolcott. The three-part series, through its Americanisation of Black-British crime, had a distinctly imported-feel.[26] Although **Wolcott** made an obvious attempt to place a 'positive' Black character at the heart of the drama, this was juxtaposed alongside a more 'typical' and apparently realistic (authenticity was attempted in terms of dress, locations and language) image of the Black criminal world (drugs, muggers, disaffected male youth), thus inviting criticisms that it depended on 'the misrepresentation and criminalisation of the entire black community' (Caesar et al, *Grass Roots,* March 1981).

Another crime series, **Widows** (Thames TV/ITV, Tx:16.3-20.4.83), despite its obvious twist

on the conventions of the genre (it was female-led), replicated a chain of stereotypes (drugs,

prostitution, absentee father, dancer turned stripper) in its main Black character, Bella

O'Reilly (Eva Mottley/Debbie Bishop). Here we had a set of female characters on the 'wrong

side of the law' (armed robbers) in a drama written and directed by women (Lynda La Plante

and Linda Agran respectively). This created a potential space for experimenting with the genre

and its stereotypical tendencies. The series has usefully been analysed by Charlotte Brunsdon

as one which related to race in general, and the Bella character in particular, with great

ambiguity, not least because of the 'national, unsympathetic and uninformative coverage' of

Eva Mottley's 'real-life' death in February 1985 (and thus absence from the second series

Widows II (ITV, Tx:3.4-8.5.85)) (Brunsdon in Daniels and Gerson, 1989:95). Following Eva

Mottley's death, her step-father said, 'She claimed sexual and racial prejudice with the

production crew of the series, but she was more emotionally upset about that than depressed'

(Anthony Earlham, quoted in *The Times*, 21.3.85). Described on different occasions in

Widows as looking, "too much like a fella", as a "tart/slag" (by Dolly Rawlins) and as "the

black bloke", Bella functioned as a 'strong woman, but only because of her Blackness. Bella's

screen criminality was closely tied to her ethnicity, her appearance and her personality. Debbie

Bishop replaced Eva Mottley in the second series and with that took away the nuances of

what did, in fact, make the original Bella vaguely convincing. (Part of this credibility, as

Brunsdon suggests, came from the 'real life' criminal past of Mottley and thus (it was implied

through various press coverage) her ability to make a natural transition into playing a criminal

on-screen.)

An interesting intervention in the crime genre was **Bombay Blue** (Channel 4, Tx:4.10.97-8-11.97), a six-part police adventure series. This featured Shan Khan as a Glaswegian cop (Tarun Dev) sent to India to capture a drugs-baron. The series was distinctive in the sense that it took us out of the traditional setting of England's streets or the police workplace, to Bombay (and thus broke free of the 'gritty realism' convention of the British crime series). Unusually for a drama series, it also chose an unestablished, young actor for the lead part. The overall effect was a hybrid of travel show, detective series and Bollywood film rolled into one. Nevertheless, the scripts were sometimes weak and it did lapse into Bollywood-style melodrama with Indian hoodlums and oppressive fathers getting in the way of 'liberty', and it did resort to the conflict-ridden young Asian love theme (Dev faced problems when he fell in love with Meena (Shiuli Subaya) because of her father's insistence that she had to have an arranged marriage). Furthermore, its transmission time of 8 p.m. on a Saturday was an unenviable slot, competing with **Casualty** (BBC1) and **Blind Date** (ITV).

c) CASE STUDY 3: The Liberal Impulse of Prime Suspect

The **Prime Suspect** (Granada/ITV, Tx:7-7.4.91-1996) series worked within the context of dramatic realism, quality and innovation. As well as providing the obvious novelty of a female figurehead fronting the male sphere of the crime series, **Prime Suspect** also introduced a new 'authenticity' in terms of what it showed us of the internal working of the police-world. The subtexts of both **Prime Suspect 2** (ITV, Tx:14-15.12.92) and **Prime Suspect 5 (Errors of Judgment)** (ITV, Tx:20-21.10.96) related to issues around race, Black-Britishness and crime. By contrast, the first **Prime Suspect** chose sexism as its social theme and was notable for its absence of Black police, characters and settings. Ironically, it was this omission of Blackness which added to the realism of the text, allowing the institutional Whiteness of the police-force

and Englishness of its 'canteen culture' to come through.

Prime Suspect 2 therefore, was notable for introducing a Black representative of the law, Bob

Oswalde (Colin Salmon). The creation of more than one Other with DCI Jane Tennison's

(Helen Mirren) as a woman in a male police culture and Oswalde as a Black policeman,

dispersed the sociological emphasis between gender and race. Like Tennison, Oswalde's

character was constructed as contradictory. The double image (Tennison as privately

vulnerable but professionally tough, and Oswalde as a hybrid of hard Black male and sensitive

'New Man') encouraged a complex reading of the characters and their roles. This was

especially evident in the 'trick' opening of the series when Oswalde, unbeknown to the

television audience, acted out the part of a criminal suspect (as part of a police reconstruction).

Having been invited to read him as criminal, we were immediately challenged to rethink

prevalent views on race and crime (i.e. that Oswalde was, in fact, on 'the right side' of the

law). In addition, the text here acknowledged itself (and the crime genre) as a mediated and

manipulative cultural product.

Alongside Oswalde's narrative hold during this opening sequence and his key role in

subsequently unfolding the 'real' crime, he also acted as Tennison's lover. This last thread of

the narrative however, never substantially evolved and, in fact, disappeared in place of other

plot developments. This unresolved part of the narrative made it a 'story hole', curiously

incomplete in a text otherwise directed towards closure (solving the crime). It was made all the

more strange because the sexual encounter was initially given narrative precedence (Tennison

and Oswalde were seen in bed together in the first ten minutes). The sexual tension between

the two characters remained unsettled. Of course such carefully crafted narratives are

(un)developed for a purpose and, to this end, I would argue that the depiction of the encounter

merely served to cement, amongst other things, Tennison's liberalism (sexually involved with

her racial Other) and thus ensured that Tennison continued to sustain the narrative image of the

first **Prime Suspect**. The affair also signified Tennison's femininity, her heterosexuality and

the fact that she was both open to, yet needed no man. As Ros Jennings reminds us, 'the fact

that Tennison is a woman, means that her sexuality and sexual practices are subject to much

more dramatic scrutiny than if she were a man' (Jennings in Newcomb, 1997:1288) and so

Oswalde functioned here as a device to cross over into Tennison's private sphere while also

securing the essential modernity and liberalism of the text and its leading character. Oswalde in

this sense, also functioned as a 'narrative donor.'

Paul Marcus, the producer of **Prime Suspect 2** argued that, 'the characters are real, diverse

and complex; not stereotyped by their ethnic identity. It hasn't happened before. I think we're

all proud of that' (Marcus, *Weekly Journal*, 10.12.92:14). Indeed, the series often juxtaposed

its diverse Black characters with the effect of highlighting their heterogeneity.[27] This was most

clearly shown in the interaction between Oswalde (the bridge to the 'black world') and Tony

Allen (a Black suspect who eventually hung himself in a police-cell) each of whom represented

ideologically opposed positions and, as such, demonstrated how Blackness does not

homogenise police and 'street' positions. At one point, Tony asked Oswalde, "What kind of

brother are you to say that to me?" and Oswalde replied, "I'm not your brother, I'm a police-

officer". Tony concluded, "Because you want to be White. You hate your Black brothers and

sisters. You're Black". Tennison, although she was sometimes shown to be adept at 'the world

of Black crime' (confirming her 'street-awareness'), was primarily shown up as conceding to

liberalism without truly understanding its substance. For example, at one point in **Prime**

Suspect 5, she was with a Black officer doing a search in a home where there was some

Nigerian food in the kitchen. Finding a note, she asked the officer, "What's this Henry? Is this

Nigerian anything?" After studying the note he replied, "This is sometimes used in our

country. We call it shorthand".

Section 4: New Dramatic Spaces in the 1990s

a) The Marking and Absence of Black Characters in British Television Drama

Significant advances have been made since the late 1980s in terms of the quantity of on-screen

Black representation in drama. Indeed, it was as recent as 1988 that Black actor Treva Etienne,

while playing a fireman (Tony Sanderson) in LWT's **London's Burning**, was being told 'by

people on the streets, "you were one of the first"' (Etienne, interview with Malik, 24.11.95).

While Etienne agrees that **London's Burning** brought him exposure and was a great learning

experience, he is also aware that the writers found it difficult to negotiate giving his character

both a home and work life. He says, 'They got a little bit weary about how far they could go

with it...if a Black person doesn't fit, then they become the afterthought...They try to write

something which they think is correct but without any real type of research' (Etienne,

interview with Malik, 24.11.95). It is still clearly sometimes the case that a Black character is

brought in to introduce an element of conflict into the story. The classic version of this is the

inter-racial relationship, which threatens to destabilise the White family nexus (Pines, 1997).

The Black character is also often perceived through the White characters. As Mike Phillips

says, 'Black people are always acted upon. They are always reacting. They never have any

sense of the initiative, and their lives are always totally bonded by the issue of discrimination.

They're always confined by the responses by white people. White people look at black

people in that way - you don't exist unless they're looking at you' (quoted in Pines,

1992:178-9). We can note, for example, that it is usually the White characters who are seen to have to adjust to the presence of 'race'. Moreover, the issue of 'race' is only usually acknowledged when Black people are around, implying that Whites do not have a noticeable or problematic race.

But it is also the case that the myth that Black characters won't appeal to mainstream audiences has been challenged in recent years by a number of lead (although sometimes stereotypical) Black parts in some of Britain's most popular dramas. For example, Cathy Tyson as a prostitute (Carol) in **Band of Gold** (ITV, 1995), which got a huge audience share of 58% (14.8 million viewers), and its follow-up **Gold** (ITV, 1997) and other series such as **Bugs** (BBC1, 1995 -) featuring Jaye Griffiths (formerly seen as DI Sally Johnson in **The Bill**, ITV, 1984-).[28] Popular medic-dramas such as **Casualty** and **Cardiac Arrest** have also been notable for introducing interesting central Black characters (Patrick Robinson as Ash and Ahsen Bhatti as Dr. Raj respectively).[29] Most of the other long-running series/serials such as **London's Burning, The Bill** and **Soldier Soldier** have Black characters and frequently address 'Black issues'. Of course this in itself does not necessarily signify a radical breakthrough and it is more revealing to look at *how* these images and characters have been developed.

We might take the example of an episode of the popular army series **Soldier, Soldier** (ITV, **Beast**, Tx:12.11.96), which featured a Sikh soldier, Ravi Singh, who was brought in to introduce the issue of racism in the army. The opening sequence depicted a graphic racist attack on Ravi by a group of hooded soldiers who were eventually uncovered and expelled from the constabulary. A visiting soldier, Frank Skinner, was eventually found to be the racist ringleader (denoted by the Union Jack tattoo on his arm), and dismissed. Thus, in order to

achieve a 'happy ending', the racist element was eliminated. As well as this classic

denouement, where moral order is reinstated, **Beast** was also framed around reductionist

character-types: the liberal female voice of humanism, the evil racist, the good White and the

victimised Asian. More importantly though, the viewer was not encouraged to empathise with

Ravi (the victim), but with his fellow soldier, Steve Evans. Evans, as well as being one of

Soldier, Soldier's regular characters, was the one who acted as White hero, saving Ravi from

a bloody racist attack. He was the one who disassociated himself from his racist colleague

(Skinner) and thus was seen to have made the ultimate concession. Thus, Ravi thanked him for

his bravery, saying, "You were good mates, it can't have been easy". Another soldier said of

Ravi, "With a little help from his mates, he got through it". Ravi meanwhile, by running away

from the army was shown to be unable to fend off his racist attackers and was told by Evans,

"You beat bullying by standing up, not running away". The quest to find closure within the

episodic structure of **Soldier, Soldier** meant that no space was granted to consider racism as

an open-ended reality. The closed structure meant that racism no longer 'needed' to continue

as a moral concern for the other characters, the script-writers or indeed, the audience. (See

Chapter 2 on 'solutions journalism' in the context of the documentary **The Peacemaker.**)

As well as noting where and how Black characters are featured in drama, it is also worth

acknowledging where they are *not* seen. We have already examined how Whiteness is privileged

in historical drama and certain soap operas, but there is also a general absence of 'Blackness' in

less urban-based dramas or ones which attempt to authentically reflect a more traditional 'way

of British life'. Examples include the big ITV dramas **Heartbeat, Wycliffe, Peak Practice,**

Inspector Morse and historical costume dramas such as **And The Beat Goes On** (C4, 1996),

Pride and Prejudice (BBC1, 1995), **Middlemarch** (BBC2, 1994), **Jane Eyre** (ITV, 1997)

and **Our Mutual Friend** (BBC2, 1998).[30] We are also more likely to find Black scriptwriters

working on **Brookside** (Maurice Bessman and Jo Johnson for example) than on a

quintessentially English series like **Jeeves and Wooster**. Lenny Henry argues of the

importance of Black writers and directors in television drama, 'If they let us direct **Screen**

Two or **Eastenders**, we might give them a bit of flavour. We might tell them about the black

community in a different way but we don't always want to be in your face with it. Producers

will be very sorry if they miss out on this talent' (Henry, *Black Film Bulletin*, Summer

1994:16). Alternative 'costume dramas' such as the television adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's

Whitbread Prize winning novel, **The Buddha Of Suburbia** (Dir: Roger Michell, BBC2,

Tx:3.11.93-24.11.93) and Caryl Phillips' **The Final Passage** (Channel 4, Tx:7-8.7.96) have

been produced in the 1990s and there have been Black-centred drama series such as **Turning**

World (Channel 4, 1997), **Peacock Spring** (1996) and **Little Napoleans** (Channel 4,

Tx:7.6.94-28.6.94). **Little Napoleans** (written by Michael Abbensetts) was unique in having

two Black lead parts (Norman Beaton and Saeed Jaffrey) and **The Buddha of Suburbia** was a

unique take on the rites-of-passage drama (it was the story of seventeen year old Karim

(Naveen Andrews), his Indian father, Haroon (Roshan Seth) and English mother) (see Chapter

9).[31]

We have already seen how 'Blackness' has been used to symbolise modernity in the

representational field (Chapter 6) and how this, in turn, has been used as a marker of

innovation. In recent years, we have seen this materialise in fiction, and most obviously in a

number of high-profile, US-produced dramas such as **ER, Homicide: Life On The Streets**

and **NYPD Blue** (all of which have been screened in Britain on Channel 4). Within the British

context, there are some signs of this happening in the late 1990s. Certainly, Black characters

are increasingly more likely to be seen in the contemporary urban-based drama (i.e. more 'legitimately' British in city spaces). It has been argued that what Ben Gibson has called the 'scones and cricket marketplace' (1992 'Black and White in Colour' Conference notes) is showing signs of losing its position as the crown of 'Quality British Drama'.[32] In the early 1990s, Farrukh Dhondy argued that British television was witnessing a 'vengeance' against its dominant 'middle-classness' and that this shift was evident in a new bias towards 'recruiting working class writers. The most obvious working class writer today is...the black writer, because there is a kind of liveliness, energy and anger in black writing - and people who commission things want that. They are paying lots of money for anger' (quoted in Pines, 1992:172). There are not many signs of this 'Angry Black' voice in television drama today but, whilst the recurrent investment in classic period pieces continues, it does appear that alongside that there is a move towards commissioning drama that relates to the contemporary.

b) CASE STUDY 4: Holding On and This Life

It is where cultures meet, collide and co-operate that the new is emerging.

(Trevor Phillips, *The Guardian*, 13.10.97:7)

Two dramas which have signified this new trend towards fictionalising the contemporary, were **This Life** (BBC2, 1st Tx:18.3.96/Last Tx:10.7.97) and **Holding On** (BBC2, 2.9.97-21.9.97). Despite the significant degree of Black characters and storylines in each, neither set themselves up as 'Black dramas' *per se*. Apart from this lack of conscious address, they each, in quite different ways, made radical breakthroughs in terms of genre and in the way 'Blackness' in mainstream media texts has typically been presented. Set in contemporary London, **Holding On** (which received a BAFTA in 1998 for Best TV serial) established a number of

interweaving (but at first seemingly unconnected) storylines, resulting in a convoluted narrative

structure designed to 'reflect life at breaking-point'. Amongst its Black cast were Treva

Etienne as Lloyd, a security guard seduced by Hilary (Lesley Manville), and Ahsen Bhatti

(Zahid) as a vengeful, confused tax officer.[33] Much of the narrative centred on the build-up and

repercussions of the murder of Chris (Raazaq Adoti), a young Black pirate-radio DJ.

Although the modern clichés of 'sex, drugs and drum 'n' bass' were depicted as central to the

young Black-British urban experience, the characters were, in general, both diverse and

complex. As Chris's bereaved mother, Florrie (Ellen Thomas) said regarding how to handle her

son's publicity campaign, "I'm just not sure I want to turn this into a race thing"

(Tx:14.10.97) - and this appeared to echo the general multicultural ethos of the drama in terms

of the way its Black characters were fictionalised. If there was a wider message in terms of race

in the eight-part series, then it was that Black and White are integrally connected in modern

society. This fact was built into the very structure of the series, which started out in its

opening episodes separating the Black and White fictional worlds, only to see them gradually

connect in rich, emotional and sometimes tragic (Chris' death) ways. As Zahid said to his

English girlfriend, Helen (Rachel Power), "Why is it always up to us to bloody integrate?", and

in the drama we never got a sense that a less-important (Black) storyline had to organise itself

around a more dramatically engaging (White) one. In this sense, the dramatic centre was not

always based around 'Whiteness'. If there was to be one criticism of the series, it was more to

do with its relevance to an eighties rather than a nineties audience (dysfunction, paranoia and

decay seem misplaced themes within the public context of Blairite compassion) than with its

depiction of urban Blackness.

Like most good television fiction, **This Life** depended on the concept of persona, confinement

and 'the situation', in this case on a group of young lawyers and flatmates (who also just

happened to be multicultural). The series arguably became British television's most successful

attempt at capturing the 'real lives' of twenty-somethings and on producing a totally addictive

'anti-soap'[34] (although **This Life** had some features of the conventional soap opera, it also

worked against them. For example, it ended!). **This Life** brought in relatively new television

writers (such as Ian Iqbal Rashid chosen for the BBC's Black Screen script-writing scheme) to

script individual episodes. On the request of Michael Jackson (then BBC2 controller), it was

set-up as a low-budget but stylish continuing drama. By the middle of its second series, **This**

Life had become a cult success (and highly commended in the press). Despite its not

unimpressive viewing-figures (an average audience of 2.7 million viewers each week) and pleas

to bring back a third series, the BBC decided against it, because, according to BBC controller

Mark Thompson, "the second series simply couldn't be bettered" (cited from **Points of View**,

Tx:29.10.97).

This Life moved its one in five (first series) and two in five (second series) total of Black

leading characters beyond mere tokenism by creating them according to personality rather than

what they brought to the text sociologically. **This Life's** lack of self consciousness about the

fact that it was foregrounding Milly (Amita Dhiri) one week or Ferdy (Ramon Tikaram) the

next, was plainly to its merit.[35] Each of these lead roles was integral to how the other one

worked and, as such, the Black and White characters operated alongside each other without

each one's race being the defining issue. The series implicitly broke from the customary placing

of Blacks as secondary characters and from the conventional modes of dramatically picturing

Blackness (thus no bricks were thrown through windows, no arranged marriages happened and

none of the obvious problems were created by inter-racial relationships). Although the characters were far from problem-free, they were seen to have troubles not directly caused by their ethnicity. The sense of 'realism' was heightened not only by the seamless characterisation but also by the free-flow filming techniques. The actors did not use marks and thus were not restricted by the camera (it followed them rather than the other way round); a single camera was used to give a jerky camera effect and documentary-feel; and naturalistic (low) lighting was used.

Although some might criticise **This Life** for having overlooked the ethnicities of its characters (for example, the inter-racial relationship between Milly and Egg was never noted as 'inter-racial') the pay-off was fully-rounded, credible, Black characters - facilitated, I would suggest, precisely because of the only-occasional reference to race. Interestingly, the one time we did get an acknowledgement of Milly's Pakistani origins, was when an Urdu-speaking prospective flatmate made certain assumptions about the type of Muslim girl she *should* be. He was sharply dismissed by Milly. Milly was prissy, over-sensitive and controlling; Ferdy was greedy, indulgent, but placid - how many other Black characters in television drama over the years can we say we 'know' so intimately and can describe in such complex ways? Each (Black and White) character had a range of problems, concerns and interests. Thus, while Milly's married boss (O Donnell) might have used her as a bit of exotica, this was never explicitly acknowledged; while Ferdy's racial difference (he played a Mexican but is actually Figian/Malaysian) might have been identity-forming, his concerns over his sexuality were the main source of his confusion. In addition, the fact that there were two to three Black characters out of a relatively small cast, lifted the burden off any one Black character needing to be 'representative' and 'three dimensional'. So the fact that top, Black lawyer Graham (Cyril Nri)

remained a peripheral and elusive character for the greater part of the series, and that Paul J

Medford's camp clubber role was only briefly seen, did not reek of mere tokenism. The

success of both **Holding On** and **This Life** was that they provided no easy answers for the

audience and did not find it necessary to dramatically signpost 'this is a Black character' (but

without awkwardly sidestepping it). Both dramas were chaotic and at times difficult to get a

grip on, but deftly managed to make their Black characters and settings both dramatically

engaging *and* politically astute.

Conclusion

Our lives are made up of stories and the reality of the pluralism through which we exist can

only be realised through representation if we produce and witness '*the widest range of these

truths*' (Garnett, 1998:15). There have been notable examples of this in TV drama - **Fable,**

This Life, Holding On, Buddha of Suburbia - but these are exceptions. More typically,

fictional representations of Black people have been based around themes of colonialism and

race relations, and usually been presented in predictable ways. Representations of Asian and

African-Caribbean women have been particularly limited to a narrow range of types and

confined to certain spaces. The dominant sense of awkwardness around what a Black

character/drama/writer's work is *supposed* to be about has, I would suggest, been to the

detriment of creating complex drama which involves Black people both on a textual and

employment level. As Mike Phillips reminds us:

> We are all multicultural in our homes and on the streets so we have a private
>
> multiculturalism which isn't reflected in the media. When I watch **Inspector**
>
> **Morse** I don't think of it as not belonging to me and there is no reason why
>
> a white person shouldn't feel the same about our programmes except that

they are never given the chance to because those kind of programmes are very

rarely made. (Phillips, *Impact*, 2, 1992:27)[36]

In this sense, although diverse viewers are clearly able to make assorted readings from the same

text, the types of Black stories which are invested in, the places in which they are seen and the

times in which they are shown, are clearly based upon deeply-ingrained assumptions about

different ethnic groups' realities, skills, tastes and viewing practices - assumptions made by

writers, commissioning editors, and so on. Pauline Henriques contests the notion that the range

and quality of Black representation in television drama is necessarily better today than what

came before. She says, 'We haven't seen anything of the same stature since **All God's**

Chillun Got Wings...I'm delighted to see that we're getting on, but I think we need more

quality drama opportunities to show the talent we have' (quoted in Pines, 1992:32). Tony

Garnett, one of the key players in the history of British television drama, argues that in general

terms, 'the range of our drama is impoverishly narrow, its convictions depressingly

conformist, the results all too often lifeless and predictable' (Garnett, 1998:14-15).

Whilst the 1990s has witnessed some innovative moves in drama, the fact still remains that the

genre is very difficult for Black writers and actors to enter into. To redress this, there have

been various Black-targeted initiatives to nurture and access Black production and script-

writing talent: the BBC three year project, Black Screen; Crucial Films' **Funky Black Shorts**;

and the BFI, British Screen and LFVDA project, Screenwrite. Frances Anne Solomon, Lenny

Henry and Henry Martin, all key figures in initiating these schemes, have stressed the

importance of targeted strategies in order to encourage Black creative talent. Martin says that it

is important that the Screen Write scriptwriters, 'understand how you build and construct

character, what narrative structure is and its relationship to the storytelling tradition and to dramatic writing generally' (Martin, interview with Malik, 16.5.96; see film chapter for more on these schemes). Dhondy's successor, Yasmin Anwar, agrees that drama needs to be a priority for the Channel 4 Multicultural Department and that new types of fiction need to be seen. She says, 'Drama is definitely a priority...I'm looking for the kinds of things I haven't seen much of. I'm not looking for self-referential, inward-gazing, issue-led stories...we need to build on a lot more interesting things than those that are made in the name of multiculturalism' (Anwar, interview with Malik, 22.10.97).

There are, in fact, many important continuities in this history, where a lot of Black actors today are still being overlooked for lead roles because they are either not considered to have sufficient experience or are not thought to be 'right' for the part. Drama carries its own cultural values and the labour of acting, is, for many, seen as beyond the capabilities of Black people. Drama is not sport or comedy or dancing, or something else which simply requires 'natural' or 'innate' talent, but a craft which has to be learnt and as such is sometimes assumed to be more difficult for Black people to master. As Yvonne Brewster, Director of the Talawa Theatre Company comments on this continuing bias:

> We [Black actors] are not supposed to perform classics such as Shakespeare. We aren't allowed to borrow or draw on our own culture and use it in an interpretative way with European work. But it's fine for White directors to put White perspectives on Wole Soyinka. It's okay when English people perform Greek tragedies and Chekhov. (Brewster, *The Sunday Times*, 18.2.96; my addition)

Discrimination against Black actors continues to operate on many levels. In 1997, Marianne

Jean-Baptiste, who had just been nominated for an Oscar, BAFTA[37] and Golden Globe for

her performance in Mike Leigh's **Secrets and Lies** (1996), was excluded from a trip organised

by British Screen to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cannes Film Festival. No other

Black actors were invited. At the time she said, 'If you think about it, I made history. Not

only was I the first black British woman to be nominated for an Oscar, I was the first black

British person.' The chief executive of British Screen commented, 'There were people who in

terms of credits had the edge. Everybody has their *pet omission*' (quoted in *The Guardian,*

15.5.97; my emphasis). If these 'pet omissions' and lack of appreciation for ground-breaking

Black-British talent continues, then we are unlikely to see the promotion, celebration or

encouragement of multi-ethnic drama on television. Jean-Baptiste, who trained at the Royal

Academy of Dramatic Art, is now having to turn to US drama projects, rather than ending up

doing what she refers to as 'repertory theatre in Scunthorpe' (ibid.).

NOTES

[1] Of course the readings thereon produced by viewers are dependent on various conceptual structures of difference from, and similarity to, those apparent in the text. Audience identification is, as we saw in relation to comedy, not wholly determined by the text, but is essentially of a viewer's own making.

[2] See Alan Parker in *The Guardian,* 27.10.97, 8-9. The complex history of the relationship between television and film will be discussed in the next chapter on Black-British film.

[3] Very few early dramatic pieces have survived in the archives, so there is no detailed record of their significance in the context of Black-British television. Notable for their absence are Errol John's **Moon on a Rainbow Shawl** (1960), Jan Carew's **Drama '61: The Day of The Fox** (1961), the Negro Theatre Workshop's **The Dark Disciples** (1966), Evan Jones' **Go Tell It On Table Mountain** (1967), Obi Egbuna's **Wind Versus Polygamy** (1968), Barry Reckord's **In The Beautiful Caribbean** (1972) and Alfred Fagon's **Shakespeare Country** (1973). The oral testimonies of those involved in the productions, such as those found in **Black and White In Colour** are therefore of huge historical value.

[4] Robert Adams was, in fact, the first Black actor to be seen on British television (**Theatre Parade: Scenes from Hassan**, BBC, Tx:14.6.37), and the first Black actor to play a Shakespearian role on television (the Prince of Morocco in **The Merchant of Venice**, BBC, Tx:1.7.47). He also appeared in W.B. Yeats' **Deirdre** (BBC, Tx:9.5.38) and **The Emperor Jones** (BBC, Tx:11.5.38). In 1944, Adams founded the Negro Arts Theatre in Britain.

[5] The act of 'blacking up' was quite common in British theatre. In 1938, Ralph Richardson blacked up in the Old Vic's production of Othello, and Laurence Olivier did this for the same role in 1964. Despite a heavy Asian cast in Channel 4's adaptation of M.M Kaye's **The Far Pavilions** (Tx:3-5.1.84), Amy

Irving blacked-up to play the lead part of Princess Anjuli. Meanwhile, Michael Bates blacked-up to play Rangi Ram in **It Ain't Half Hot Mum** (BBC, 1974-81). Although rare today, 'blacking up' still continues. In 1996, there was some controversy over plans for Jeremy Irons to play the founder of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, in a feature film due for release in Spring 1988 (discussed on **Newsnight** Tx:12.8.96). In 1997, it materialised that Christopher Lee had been cast to play the lead role in **Jinnah**. Writer and producer Akhbar Ahmed argued that, "He is the closest look-alike I have found on-screen...He could carry the role with conviction on the world stage" (cited from **Network East**, BBC2, Tx:1.11.97).

[6] Following his appearance as Dr. Aziz in Santha Rama Rau's adaptation of E.M Forster's **A Passage To India**, Zia Mohyeddin went on to star in the television version directed by Waris Hussein (as part of BBCTV's 'Play Of The Month', 1965) directed by Waris Hussein. Meanwhile, fellow Asian actor Saeed Jaffrey had set up his own English theatre company (Unity Theatre) in Delhi in the early 1950s and has since gone on to become possibly the most popular Indian actor of his generation on British television (his main television work has included **Gangsters**, 1975-6, **Tandoori Nights**, 1985-7, and **Little Napoleons**,1994.

[7] **Fable** raised the questions 'Who are we?' and 'How did we get here?' The film **Suture** (Dir: Scott McGehee and David Siegel, USA, 1993) followed similar themes. In this, the two brothers Vincent (White) and Clay (Black) were 'swapped over' following an explosion, plastic surgery and chronic amnesia. Clay was remodelled as Vincent but remained Black to the spectator - although no-one within the text acknowledged or saw his Blackness.

[8] Although this section will focus on the 1970s up to the mid-1980s, there are some dramas screened during this period which will be dealt with in Section 3, since they fit into specific categories of drama which I pay emphasis to there. For the same reason, I mention **Rhodes** in this section although it is a 1990s production.

[9] According to a survey carried out by Public Attitude Surveys Research in April 1985, the most widely watched drama programme amongst Black viewers was **Coronation Street** at 60% of those surveyed (see Manuel, 1986).

[10] Although prior to this, the BBC had produced **Parosi** (BBC, Tx:2.10.77-9.4.78), a 26 part series, written in Hindi and English, which centred on the lives of two Asian families in Britain. Dilip Hiro and Naseem Khan wrote the script, it was directed by Paul Kriwaczek and starred amongst others, Roshan Seth, Zohra Segal and Cleo Sylvestre.

[11] Following his death in December 1994, the Norman Beaton Award was set up to recognise the work and achievements of Black performers in Britain. Michael Abbensetts received the first award and in 1996, the award went to Zohra Segal for her contributions to British television.

[12] Thus, the cultural notion of historical authority which was central to a film such as **Birth Of A Nation** (Dir: DW Griffiths, US:1905, BBC, Tx:7.7.47) serves to justify a certain type of White supremacism.

[13] An exception here is Caryl Phillips' **The Final Passage** (Channel 4, Tx:7-8.7.96) which dramatically reconstructed the post-war experience of African-Caribbean immigration to Britain. Prior to coming to air, US ABC executives saw the historical slavery saga, **Roots** (1977) as a ratings-risk. It was to become the most watched entertainment programme in American broadcasting history. The twelve-hour series was also screened in Britain, and although it did not make such a huge ratings impact here, many Black Britons have cited Alex Haley's story of Kunta Kinte (La Var Burton) and Black slavery as a key cultural moment (for example, Kobena Mercer and Linton Kwesi Johnson in **Black and White in Colour** archive interviews).

[14] A notable exception here was Salman Rushdie's article 'Outside The Whale' ,1991) 87-101. See Dyer for a detailed analysis of Whiteness in relation to **Jewel**, 1997,184-206.

[15] I would argue that Paul Scott's four part Raj Quartet books on which the serial was based, essentially worked against the mores of television melodrama such as continuity of action, characters, narrative closure and linear progression, thus enhancing the overwhelming sense of awkwardness and artificiality which permeated the series.

[16] Within the context of **Rhodes'** commercial and critical failure, there was a slight lull in television drama's investment in productions which chart the colonial experience. One exception was ITV's three-part drama, **Heat of the Sun** (Tx:28.1.98-11.2.98), although this was essentially a murder-mystery set in 1930s Kenya. Another was the four-part drama **A Respectable Trade** (BBC1, Tx:19.4.98-10.5.98), an interesting exploration into the British slave trade, starring Ariyon Bakare as Mehuru and Emma Fielding as Frances Scott.

[17] At around this time, Equity's Afro-Asian Committee stressed the need for integrated casting (where possible putting Black people in roles not necessarily defined as 'Black').

[18] For example, in the 1988 ICA conference and later at the ICA Black and White in Colour Conference (November 1992) where Alon Reich, Assistant Editor at Channel 4 Drama (with specific emphasis on development) admitted, "In terms of Channel 4 drama, we have no specific initiative to bring on black and Asian talent" (Black and White in Colour conference notes).

[19] A Black gay character did not appear on **Eastenders** until 1994. This was Della Alexander, who fluctuated between her Black boyfreind, Steve Elliott (Mark Monero) and her gay love interest, Binnie Roberts (Sophie Langham). Very few Black gay characters have been seen in British television drama. Early exceptions include Sugar (Reg Tsiboe) in **Premiere: A Hymn from Jim** (BBC2,Tx:29.9.77); Polo (Ben Ellisson, a Black prostitute in **Play For Today: Coming Out** (BBC1, Tx:10.4.79); Velma Small (Isabelle Lucas) in one episode of the comedy series, **Agony (Too Much Agony, Too Little Ecstasy**, Tx:29.4.79).

[20] In September 1997, in the midst of complaints about **Eastenders'** portrayal of Irish people as drunk, dirty and disorderly, Alan Yentob argued that 'Far from putting up stereotypes, **Eastenders** has done a lot to pull them down' (**Right To Reply**, Channel 4,Tx:27.9.92). However, the BBC did apologise by admitting that 'we got it wrong, and since that is the case we are very sorry'.

[21] I have taken the term 'donor' from Montgomery et al,1992,180-1. A 'donor' is used to move the story along or denote something without themselves being significant characters. Thus, 'The donor typically has little presence in the narrative (usually appearing briefly) but has a crucial role in enabling it to develop and come to a conclusion' (Montgomery et al, 1992, 181).

[22] For example, one storyline revolved around the lawyer Ravi (Ayub Khan Din) and the kidnapping of Sam his fiancee. In October 1997, at least three episodes centred on Diane (Ellen Thomas) leaving her husband for his brother Noel (Alan Cooke).

[23] Angela Griffin, who plays Fiona received a National Television Award for 'Most Promising Newcomer' in 1995.

[24] Early crime programmes such as **Dixon of Dock Green** (BBCTV, 1955-76) and **Z Cars** (BBCTV, 1962-78) worked within the 'real life' world of law and order, although the latter series was often critical of it. One edition which foregrounded the experiences of a young Black couple was 'A Place of Safety' Tx:24.6.64) which starred Johnny Sekka and Alaknanda Samarth, a young Black couple in crisis.

[25] In November, 1997, the BBC defended itself against allegations by script-writer Jon Paul Morgan that the BBC had used his script about racial tension in Toxteth, Liverpool for **Black and Blue**.

[26] See Pines in Daniels and Gerson (1988) for how British crime series compare with US ones in their delineations of race.

[27] Criminal acts in the **Prime Suspect** series were generally not depicted as motiveless. More a 'whydunnit?' than 'whodunnit?', the **Prime Suspect** approach was later used in other series such as **Cracker** (ITV, 1994-6). In a three-part **Cracker** series entitled **To Be A Somebody** (Tx:10,17, 23.10.94) the conventional crime story of White skinhead (Robert Carlyle) Vs. Asian shopkeeper (Badi Uzzaman) was intricately crafted to reveal a psychological chain of how the former's racism had developed.

[28] **The Bill's** storylines regularly focus on Black characters and issues. Its Black cast has included Seeta Indrani as WPC Narika Datta and Lolita Chakrabarti as WPC Jamilla Blake.

[29] Bhatti also appeared in **Band Of Gold** and in Udayan Prasad's feature film **Brothers In Trouble** (1995) which was screened as part of BBC2's 'Screen Two' season (1996).

[30] In early 1998, Chris Smith (Culture and Media Secretary) urged the need for the BBC, as Britain's most important cultural institution, to produce more contemporary and less costume drama.

[31] Reviews were mixed. A *Sunday Times* critic suggested that Andrews was 'not a good enough actor to carry the series' (Landesman, 7.1.93, 14).

[32] Ratings and responses to Channel 4's recent four-part serialisation of **A Dance To The Music of Time** were poor and Mark Lawson recently suggested that, "highbrow modern fiction on television...has become a minority form which, in a vicious circle, will inevitably attract smaller audiences and then be judged a failure against the successes of the past (*The Guardian* , 16.10.97, 10).

[33] As well as those I have mentioned in the main text, **Holding On** featured, Badi Uzzaman, Chris Tummings, Victor Romero Evans and Nisha Nayer.

[34] This term was used by Mark Thompson in *The Guardian*, 10.11.97.

[35] As well as playing bisexual courier Ferdy in **This Life**, Ramon Tikaram played Judas in the West End Production of **Jesus Christ Superstar** and also starred in the film-adaptation of **Kama Sutra** (Dir: Mira Nair, India/United Kingdom/Japan/Germany, 1996).

[36] Phillips was keen to see the television adaptation of his novel **Blood Rights** (BBC2, Tx:24.10-7.11.90) screened in a peak-time, mainstream slot and for this precise reason did not take it to Channel 4 (it was subsequently produced by BBC Drama).

[37] Since 1952, 16 (out of 914) BAFTA nominations have gone to Black actors/actresses. Sidney Poitier (for **The Defiant Ones**, 1958), Whoopi Goldberg (for **Ghost**, 1990) and Samuel Jackson (for **Pulp Fiction**, 1994) are the only three (all American) to have received awards.

Chapter Nine

Pounds, Policy and Pressure: Black-British Film-Making - 'As Seen On TV'

The primary purpose of this chapter is to look at the ways in which Black-British film culture

has developed in relation to British television. Through film, many Black-British film-makers

have produced *their own* unique body of work, much of which has offered radical alternatives

to, and contested the master codes of, popular representations of 'race'. Whilst my main focus

is on film (as seen on television), I will also consider the wider institutional context which gave

rise to many of these productions. It was arguably the growth of an independent

commissioning structure which, broadly speaking, boosted Black-British film practice and

expanded the number of Black producers in the 1980s. Although I have already touched on

how these changing aspects of British broadcasting have affected other areas of programming

(see Chapters 1, 3 and 10), I want to expand on them here, because the history of Black-

British film has, in fact, been profoundly affected by changes in the production structure of

British television.

As well as addressing the social, political and cultural factors which have forged the alliance

between the two mediums, I want specifically to examine what this has meant for Black-

British film and television practitioners in the industry. As the penultimate chapter, I also

want to take this opportunity to draw together some of the arguments I have raised so far,

regarding Channel 4, independence and access, all of which directly relate to the area of Black-

British film. I am limiting myself to looking at those films which have mostly had a theatrical

release, but all of which have an obvious television link, not only in terms of having been

exhibited on the small screen but also in relation to their funding, production and distribution.

This in itself is not an onerous task since most (Black) British films since the 1980s, have had

varying degrees of interaction with British television. It is, in fact, impossible to speak of

British film without acknowledging its connection to British television. Given the scope of the

thesis, I am more interested in making this chapter an examination of Black-produced television

work rather than of how Blacks have been represented in White, mainstream film texts

(although there is a whole other story there about the role of Black people in films from

Sanders of The River (Prod: Alexander Korda, 1935), to **Sapphire** (Dir: Basil Deardon,

1959), to **Secrets and Lies** (Dir: Mike Leigh, 1996)).[1]

I will begin by looking at the emergence of Black-British films in the 1970s, although I am more

interested here in their relation to independent practice than in the films themselves, since they

do not directly relate to television in terms of finance and funding. In Section 2, I will examine

the institutional and structural dynamics between Black-British film and television practice and

more specifically focus on the role of Channel 4. In Sections 3 and 4, I will move on to look at

some of the key Black-British films of the 1980s and 1990s respectively. Despite the

impossibility of identifying a monolithic Black-British film aesthetic, I have chosen to group

these films together as 'Black-British film' because of their themes and production contexts. I

shall however, also use the working definition 'British-Asian film' to refer to those films which

deal specifically with the British-Asian experience or are made by those who descend from the

Indian sub-continent. The reader will constantly come across the term 'independent', although

I will interrogate the exact meaning of the term later.

Section 1: Early Black-British Film and Notions of Independence

While some Black audiovisual practitioners were involved in television production during the

1960s and 1970s, there were only a handful of 'practicing' Black film-makers who, with little

public funding, managed to get their films made. The most notable Black-British films to come

out of this period included **Jemima and Johnny** (Dir: Lionel Ngakane, 1963), **Ten Bob In**

Winter (Dir: Lloyd Reckord, 1963), **Dream A40** (Dir: Lloyd Reckord, 1965), **Baldwin's**

Nigger (Dir: Horace Ove, 1969) and **Reggae** (Dir: Horace Ove, 1970). Since these films were

virtually totally self-financed by single film-makers (with the exception of **Ten Bob In Winter**

which was funded by the BFI),[2] they had no immediate dependency on or relationship with

other cultural institutions, although this too ensured that they remained marginalised in terms

of exhibition and general support. Most Black film-makers also found it virtually impossible to

organise independently, given the comparatively expensive nature of the medium.

The widespread prejudices which I have outlined in relation to Black artists, writers and

producers (Chapter 8), can also be related to film. For example, many Black film-makers of the

time recall how it was widely assumed that they could only make realist, political films about

'race' (i.e. films about discrimination, problems, victimisation and racism). Furthermore, if

there were films to be made on these subjects, then it was also assumed that there were plenty

of 'professional' White film-makers around to make them (we saw in Chapters 2 and 8, the

preponderance of programmes produced by White directors *about* Black and Asian

experiences). One of the early producers of Black-British film, Lloyd Reckord, says that his

primary purpose in directing two experimental films was to get into television. He recalls how

he thought, 'this was the way to do it - a way of showing the television companies that I could

direct a film. But it didn't work. I showed them the first film, then the second...but they just

weren't interested. I got the impression that they weren't interested at that time in hiring black

directors' (Reckord in Pines, 1992:54-5) (also see Chapter 8 on Edric Connor). A similar

experience has been recounted by Lionel Ngakane who, although he was based in England,

enjoyed a more fulfilling career working with African cinema (see *Black Film Bulletin*, Vol.2,

No.2, Summer 1994:3). In the late 1960s, Ngakane said, 'the trouble in this country is that

people in theatre and films simply can't visualize a coloured man as a director...I have been

here for eighteen years now and am still considered incapable of handling British subjects'

(quoted in *The Times*, 15.11.68). Although a number of today's leading film-makers in Britain

received their training and got exposure through television drama in the 1960s and 1970s these,

as Isaac Julien observes, were almost all White men (e.g. Stephen Frears, Ken Loach and Mike

Leigh) (Julien in Givanni, 1995:55-62).[3] The fact is that, as Reckord testifies, Black talent

simply was not nurtured in the same way as White talent.

Those feature films which emerged in the 1970s and focused on the Black-British experience

included productions such as **Pressure**[4] (Dir: Horace Ove, 1975) (the first Black-British

feature-length film to be funded by the BFI); **A Private Enterprise** (Dir: Peter K. Smith, 1974;

Co-written by Dilip Hiro) (a White-directed BFI-funded feature to examine the British-Asian

experience); and **Black Joy**[5] (Dir: Anthony Simmons, 1977) (another White-produced film,

based on an idea taken from Jamal Ali's play 'Dark Days and Light Nights'). They all tended

to exemplify the documentary-realist, social-issue genre, even if they were categorised as

'dramatic features'. The roots of this quest to retell Black stories 'realistically' has to be

located within the context of the social-realist tradition, which had hitherto been used by White

practitioners as the privileged aesthetic form in which to address the 'problem' of Blackness

(for example in television documentaries, drama press journalism and photography) (see Bailey

and Hall, 1992:18). 'Realism' was widely considered as the most appropriate mode through

which the (mis)representations of the past could be 'amended'. In this sense, such films were

important, amongst other reasons, for the ways in which they 'answered back' to what Jim

Pines has called the 'official race relations narrative' which had so far pervaded this history

(Pines 1988:29). They can be seen, as I have argued elsewhere (Malik, 1996), as falling into the

category of what Cameron Bailey has described as 'cinema of duty' films:

> Social issue in content, documentary-realist in style, firmly *responsible* in
>
> intention - [the cinema of duty] positions its subjects in direct relation to
>
> social crisis, and attempts to articulate 'problems' and 'solutions to
>
> problems' within a framework of centre and margin, white and non-white
>
> communities. The goal is often to tell buried or forgotten stories, to write
>
> unwritten histories, to 'correct' the misrepresentations of the mainstream.
>
> (Bailey, 1992:38; my addition)

These films were also essentially part of an oppositional film practice. The concept of an

oppositional film culture and independent film practice first emerged in the 1930s, largely as a

result of the introduction of 16mm film stock which had enabled practitioners to work

independently of larger-scale commercial studio systems (Macpherson, 1980). A tradition of

workers' film collectives established themselves in Britain.[6] During the 1960s and 1970s, three

important things happened which helped to sustain this tradition. Firstly, by the 1960s and

1970s a number of movements concerned with various issues such as womens' liberation, civil

rights, gay liberation and nuclear disarmament had emerged. Secondly, there was the influence

of 'New American Cinema' and the US Black Arts movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which

expressed an obvious interest in the relation between aesthetics and politics. And finally, there

was the establishment of the London Film-Makers' Co-op (1966), Cinema Action (1968), The

Other Cinema distribution agency and the Berwick Street Collective, which all contributed

institutionally to the practical development of a distinctively oppositional and independent

film movement (see Cooke in Nelmes, 1996:315). By the 1970s, a support structure had begun

to develop. The Arts Council (a public body funded by the Department of National Heritage)

established funding for films in 1972, and this was followed by smaller-scale funding by

Regional Arts Associations. It has been argued that the British Film Institute (a public body

subsidised by the Department of National Heritage) was more keen to pump money into its

Regional Film Theatres than to subsidise independent film (see Whitaker in Auty & Roddick,

1985). In 1974, the Independent Film-makers' Association (IFA) was formed to, 'provide a

properly constituted organisation which could effectively promote the interests of

independent film-makers and mobilise such forces as were vital to create viable structures for

independent production' (Sheila Whitaker in Auty & Roddick, 1985:85). It was out of this

context of collective practice and independent cinema that the Black-British workshop sector

was to emerge. This was partially as an alternative (since they were directly involved in

production) to other Black groups of the time such as the Black Media Workers Association

(the pressure group who were seeking mainstream access in the early 1980s) (see Chapter 3).

Section 2: The Film/Television Set-Up and the Difference of Channel 4[7]

> The 1980s effectively saw the British film industry starved, beaten senseless
>
> and plugged into a life-support system called Channel 4. (Smedley and
>
> Woodward, 1991)

It has been argued that during the 1980s 'all serious film-making was done for television'

(Leigh in Fitch, 1989). The decade was one in which British film-making was deemed to

represent a renaissance, with more films being produced than in any single decade since the

1950s (Elsaesser in Friedman, 1993). Within the context of various Black political movements

(centred around areas such as immigration legislation and Black workers' rights - see Chapter

1) and the general Black arts movement which had taken root in Britain and had been

developing since the 1960s (resulting in certain multicultural policy interventions - see

Chapters 1, 3 and 8), there arose a specific interest in developing Black-British film. One of the

major turning points for Black artists in general, was the publication of an influential report by

Naseem Khan in 1976, 'The Arts Britain Ignores'. The report was instrumental in opening up

a debate about funding for Black artists. Khan called for a reassessment of the overall

distribution of financial and other resources invested in the Black community, and this

intervention led to the establishment of the Minority Arts Advisory Service. Influenced by

this and the other campaigns directed at the mainstream media in the late 1970s, an increasing

number of 'minority artists' had, by the early 1980s, begun to receive funding. It was gradually

being realised that Black people in Britain wanted to be acknowledged not only as the

consumers but also as the producers of art.

a) The Workshops, Independence and Channel 4

A number of Black independent film collectives such as Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC),

Star Productions, Retake Film and Video Collective, Sankofa and Ceddo began to organise

themselves around particular agendas, issues and genres of film-making. Many of them had

already taken inspiration from emerging Black American independent cinema and from the

older generation of Black film-makers in Britain such as Lionel Ngakane, Menelik Shabazz

(who had just directed **Burning An Illusion**, 1981)[8] and Imruh Caesar (Bakari) who, despite

the odds, had got their films made. Furthermore, what became apparent through the first

'Black Film Festival' in 1982 (presented at the Commonwealth Institute jointly with the British Film Institute), the follow-up GLC 'Third Eye: London's Festival of Third World Cinema' (1983) (see GLC, 1986) and the 'Anti-Racist Film Programme Cinema Circuit' (1985), was that there was an audience who were interested in the work of these film-makers (Vir, interview with Malik, 30.5.96). The self-organised collectives subsequently established links with certain public institutions such as the GLC (which had an Ethnic Minorities Unit and where Parminder Vir was an Arts Officer with a brief for so-called 'minority arts' - see Chapter 1), the British Film Institute, the Arts Council and the newly-formed Channel 4 in order to get financial support (see Owusu, 1986). British television, and particularly Channel 4, was to become a key player in this process.

In early 1982, the Workshop Declaration was drawn up (see Appendix H). This was an industrial agreement signed by the BFI, the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT), television companies such as Channel 4, and English Regional Arts Associations which included the GLC and the Welsh Arts Council (see Appendix H). General agreements about pay and conditions were negotiated so that a British independent film and video sector (six of the collectives were Black) could materialise and develop (see Lambert, 1982 for funding details). While the declaration stated that the workshops were owned and controlled by the people who ran them and thus allowed significant room for experimentation, there were also strict guidelines about how they would function (see Hussein in Husband, 1994:136-39). But the non-industrial, grant-assisted premise of the arrangement meant that those involved could, to some extent, avoid the constraints of commercialism and the logic of the market-place. In keeping with its multicultural remit and commitment to independent practice, Channel 4 (and particularly the Multicultural Department and the

Independent Film and Video Department where Alan Fountain was the commissioning editor for grant-aided film and video work) was to become the main supporter of the workshops, not only in terms of financial back-up, but also in exhibiting a number of so-called 'programmes of work' (primarily in its two 'experimental' film slots **Eleventh Hour** and **People To People**).[9]

At the same time, the co-option of the workshops by institutions such as Channel 4 meant that, while independent artists might now get help with funding, distributing and exhibiting their work, they were also signing into a culture of dependency. Unless the film-maker had enormous personal funds, s/he would always have to depend on institutional patronage and thus would probably have to establish and maintain a relationship involving a certain amount of compliance. To this degree, the very premise on which the workers film collectives' ethics had been based (politically-committed, avant-garde, film as art, non-profit motivated) would possibly have to be compromised or have their collective agenda threatened by reliance on subsidy. The term 'independent' could not be taken literally, since all 'independents' were *dependent* on sources of funding, distribution and exhibition. In fact, all independent Black production involved varying degrees and forms of dependency; the notion of 'ideological freedom' for the independent film-maker was intruded upon by the reality of economic dependency. Nevertheless, the workshops were widely regarded as the most obvious form of independent Black film-making. This was largely because of their collective practice (workshops), their aesthetic preference (anti-narrative) and their relation to audience (i.e. not being ratings-driven). Although 'independent' was the common term used to describe these new cultural workers, the category (as I will go on to explain) contained a diverse range of practitioners with different aims and areas of operation.

It is also worth noting, that this new form of cultural 'assistance' which was being 'given' to

Black film-makers by the dominant (mostly local or central government) institutions, as well as

having been vociferously fought for and demanded as a cultural right, had also been a long time

coming.[10] As Imruh Bakari says of the situation prior to the 1980s:

> There was no notion about Black people being able to make films...or
>
> anything that was BBC standard or meritorious as cinema. When we started
>
> making films, we made films because we were going to make films by any
>
> means necessary. There was no promise of finance, there was no promise of
>
> support or access even to the BFI...I was an artist, it wasn't about issues *per*
>
> *se* but we didn't want to be misrepresented, we had the right to represent
>
> ourselves. (Bakari, interview with Malik, 10.12.96)[11]

Prior to the inception of Channel 4, the main broadcasting institutions had controlled

production internally. The preference had always been for an inner production process,

essentially to 'make sure that expensive facilities like studios were used as intensively as

possible' (Sparks in Hood, 1994:137). Uniquely, Channel Four operated by commissioning

films from independent film-makers, with no requirement for them to be commercially

distributed in cinemas. This was in direct contrast to both the BBC and Independent

Television models which traditionally produced their own material 'in-house', or subsequently

bought viewing rights to films, for example, after they had been released theatrically. By

contrast, Channel 4 programmes were either: 1) purchased (or pre-purchased to support

production) from the open market (mainly from the USA); 2) produced by British (mostly

commercial) broadcasting concerns; or 3) made by independent producers who were not, in

themselves, broadcasting companies. This effectively meant that a new production structure

came into operation where those operating 'independently' outside broadcasting companies

were able to make a huge structural and programming impact on television output (see

Paterson in Petrie, 1992:40-51 for more on the changing conditions of independent production in the UK).

In general terms, the production structure of British television became more fragmented and less regimented; a whole new set of producers were employed on the basis of single commissions. In this sense, Channel 4 acted as a 'publisher-contractor', combining the public service and free market models and becoming a negotiated site between cultural practitioners, film-makers and the state. Alan Fountain (who left Channel 4 in 1994 and was replaced by Stuart Cosgrove) also stressed that he wanted 'the look' of Channel 4 to be less slick, thus 'breaking up the sameness of current television' (Fountain, quoted in Lambert, 1982:150). Since so many Black practitioners had hitherto faced the problem of getting their 'foot in the door' of television institutions or being told they lacked experience, this new commissioning ethos was generally viewed favourably, and as an encouraging response to the widespread campaigns around poor access and representation (see Chapter 3). In addition, Black independent film workers were now being offered the chance of television access while themselves remaining within the tradition of film independence.

Channel Four's first Chief Executive, Jeremy Isaacs, had been keen to bring to television, 'the sort of films which a healthy British cinema would be supplying if there were one' (Isaacs, 1982). The emphasis was on 'art house' films and on film seasons of rarely seen films from around the world (e.g. a Satyajit Ray season). Channel 4 announced its plans for the **Film on Four** strand on the first day of its transmission in November 1982. This was a major initiative, and transformed the face of British film in the process. Established by Isaacs, **Film on Four** was made up of mostly feature-length, fictional, independent productions with the chance of

subsequent cinematic distribution (films made for Channel 4 were usually made on 16mm for television and then blown-up to 35mm for commercial distribution). Between 1981 and 1990, the Channel was involved in the partial funding of at least 170 film productions made by independent companies and at one stage, was contributing, in terms of pre-sales and equity investments, to over half of the feature films produced in Britain (Petrie, 1992). Channel 4 also contributed financially to the BFI Production Board and British Screen (a private company which is partially-funded by the DTI). During the 1980s therefore, Channel 4 was crucial not only in providing financial support, but also in cultivating a general interest in (new kinds of) British film and in creating a unique environment in which the low-budget independent sector became a feasible and fundable option.

Although the workshops of the mid-1980s were crucially shaped by the cultural politics of arts subsidy, the founding members of these workshops were also motivated by their personal histories. As the first generation of sons and daughters of those who had come to Britain in the post-war years, and/or the first wave of arts graduates from British universities and schools, most of these artists approached film from a unique cultural perspective (see Chapter 6). As Isaac Julien (who attended Le Grice's Film Unit at St. Martin's School of Art), then of Sankofa, put it:

> A different perspective has emerged, a perspective that has been more critical
> because we've been allowed the space to think - and that is a luxury for a lot
> of Black people, to be allowed a space to think about what we are doing, to
> have the time to discuss, the time to look at films and be critical about what
> we are looking at, etc. (Quoted in Pines, 1985:7)

What emerged from the Black independents was not just the films themselves, but a series of

critical debates which opened up a whole new engagement with the representational terrain.

Indeed, this was one of the primary aims of the workshops - to establish educational,

developmental and exhibition programmes in order to problematise the aesthetics of Black

film-making practice. In essence, the workshops were not really (supposed to be) about

making films that would attract large audiences, but more importantly were intended to

develop as a resource-base and access-point with an emphasis on 'integrated practice' in which

production was linked to education, training and documentation. There was also a more general

commitment to producing new *forms* of representation and new ways of seeing, as well as to

debating and representing Black (British) people in the context of their own communities and

in the wider context of the nation. If such developments involved a strong sense of

'independence', film-makers still needed funding to survive and feed their craft and the space

of this newly developing cultural politics. The dependence on local or central government and

television institutions meant that, in practice, Black film-makers were often expected to

produce what funding bodies considered to be 'a *black* film' (Pines, 1988). In addition, it

would generally be easier to get the money to make a 16mm short documentary than for a

35mm fictional feature. (In compiling a list of Black and Asian films in distribution in Britain,

June Givanni found that the majority of films had running times of less than sixty minutes,

while two-thirds of them were non-fiction, Givanni, 1987.) Many workshop practitioners

were also pigeon-holed as 'experimental' or 'avant-gardists', rejecting Hollywood's story-

telling conventions, even though this had as much to do with the funders' cultural expectations

as with any conscious decision by film-makers themselves to refuse commercial fictional

treatments. (In any case, the relationship between Black independents and avant-garde groups

was not a straightforward one; see O' Pray in Higson, 1996.)

Nevertheless, by the latter part of the 1980s, a number of diverse modes of Black-British film production had emerged. There was of course the grant-aided or subsidised workshop sector, a space in which the collectives could produce relatively small-scale, micro-budget, innovative and experimental films. But there were a lot of Black film-makers who could not get in to the workshops or who had separate goals or were self-financed. Independent production companies such as Kuumba Productions, Anancy Films, Penumbra Productions and Social Film and Video were commissioned by the mainstream television industry to make individual films. There was also the occasional, low to medium budget (roughly between £0.5 and £3 million), relatively mainstream Black feature. One such example was **Playing Away** (Dir: Horace Ove, 1986) which was partially funded by Channel 4. As a light-hearted dramatic comedy based on a Brixton cricket team in a rural English setting, **Playing Away** represented a shift away from the 'heavy', social-realist approach of the majority of earlier Black features (although **Burning An Illusion** had also been a notable exception).[12] There was also evidence of some emerging innovative British-Asian film work, most notably with Suri Krishnamma's[13] **Mohammed's Daughter** (1986) which was later screened on the BBC, and Gurinder Chadha's BFI-funded first film **I'm British But...** (1989) which, through the documentation of four very different British-Asians, suggested that 'having a British identity is not as important as having a cultural identity' (Chadha in Alexander, 1989:315). There were other accomplished films made by Black women such as **Coffee Coloured Children** (Dir: Ngozi Onwurah, 1988), **Perfect Image?** (Dir: Maureen Blackwood, 1988) and **Dreaming Rivers** (Dir: Martine Attille for Sankofa, 1988). Channel 4 also later broadcast specific Black film seasons such as its Multicultural Film Season in November 1993, which screened non-British Asian films such as **Mississippi Masala** (Dir: Mira Nair, 1991), **Electric Moon** (Dir: Pradip Krishens, 1990) and **Masala** (Dir: Srinivas Krishna, 1991). Many of these films would have often been missed

at the cinema (often for distribution reasons or simply because they had only been granted a

fleeting cinematic release), but were now being brought to viewers via television (see Fountain

in Mercer, 1988:42-4). The significance of this, for White and Black viewers and for Black film

in general (which had always faced the problem of mainstream exhibition and audience-

building), was pivotal.

b) The End of Commitment

By the end of the decade it was clear that there was, in television terms, an implicit lack of

economic value for Channel 4 in its film investments while it continued to prioritise a nurturing

role. The Channel subsequently decided to invest in more 'obvious' theatrical releases which

would attract *both* television and film audiences. The very low-budget films (under about £1

million) which were usually those made by first-time directors and producers, generally had to

struggle to get meaningful distribution and thus, Channel 4 was less likely to recoup its

investments.[14] By the mid-1980s, Channel Four had begun to enter into co-production deals

with European and American organisations such as Goldcrest and the National Film Finance

Corporation in order to boost its international profile and off-load some of the funding burden,

and established **Film On Four International** (which was essentially structured for cinema in

terms of distribution). The **Film on Four** budget was much reduced and high-profile, long-

running dramas became more commonplace (in keeping with the general move away from single

films and dramas).[15] The end of institutional commitment and the beginning of a single project-

led commissioning structure began to emerge.[16] In essence, this was a strategic necessity in

order to cut staffing and operating costs: it involved a move towards short-term contracts,

multi-tasking, freelance and part-time workers. This, of course, laid Channel 4 open to

accusations that it had 'sold out' and relinquished its commitment to address minority

audiences and 'say new things in new ways'. [17]

So what had led to this change? By the late 1980s, a number of public arts institutions had also begun to feel the financial strain. This was largely as a result of the Conservative Government's abolition of the Greater London Council and other metropolitan authorities in 1986, its increasing stranglehold on public expenditure in general and on subsidies for the arts in particular, and dwindling allocations to the Local Authorities Support Grant. The knock-on effects of the Government's overriding hostility towards the public sector led Channel 4, the BFI and other public institutions to reassess their commitment to the independent film and video sector. [18] Alongside this, the cultural, technological and economic impact of Britain's first explicitly commercial (satellite) broadcaster, BSkyB and cable (with entire channels dedicated to movies and pay-per-view systems), the growth of video retail, the prospect of a fifth terrestrial channel, CD-ROM and a general increase in the sophistication of visual home entertainment, threatened to displace Channel 4 and terrestrial television at large from its position as the core provider of film to British audiences (see Chapters 1 and 10 for more on these developments).

In the main, Channel 4 gradually stopped dealing with smaller (Black) independent companies in favour of those (usually White-led ones) with a large capital-base, high-profile and formidable reputation (often run by established media personnel who, at the appropriate moment, had chosen to 'go independent'). [19] Forced to snap into the realities of the free market, Channel 4 (under obligation to sell its own advertising from early 1993), was now in direct competition with other commercial companies, both for bigger audiences and revenue. [20] The need for direct cost-cutting which led, in part, to the reduction of full-time employees in

favour of 'freelance' workers, and the effects of a diminished programme-budget and reduced

advertising revenue after the advertising boom of the major part of the 1980s, put direct

pressure on the independent sector (Sparks in Hood, 1994). By 1990, the revenue funding of

the film and video workshops had virtually ceased. Some workshops subsequently closed and

others began to operate a mixed economy, relying partly on public grants, partly on earned

commercial income.

The impact of these pivotal socio-economic shifts said something more general about the

changing cultural politics of the time, and about where (and where not) financial and other

institutional support was likely to be channelled in the future. Thus, the closure in September

1996, of the British Film Institute's African-Caribbean Unit headed by June Givanni, marked,

in a sense, the end of an important phase, because it had been one of the few remaining

institutional spaces specifically geared towards supporting the exhibition and production of

Black-British film.[21] That is not to say that Black-British film-making had in any sense, 'lost

its ground' or come to an end, but that the dominant institutions appeared to no longer be

prepared or able to carry on supporting it. As June Givanni said at the time:

> We were not surprised that the African & Caribbean Unit was not part of the
>
> BFI's new schema [outlined in its BFI 2000 paper]. 'Ethnic minority' artistic
>
> practice has always been regarded as 'temporary' within arts institutions and
>
> often operates on the 'last in first out' basis rather than being integrated as a
>
> way to develop an inclusive culturally woven British arts movement.
>
> (Givanni, *Black Film Bulletin*, Spring 1996, Vol 4, Issue 1:2; my addition)

This closing up of 'minority' spaces, compared to the earlier policy of specific targeted

support for Black initiatives and 'minority' ethnic arts, cannot be disassociated from more

extensive alterations in the way the 'multiculturalism' of the 1970s and 'anti-racism' of the

1980s were now being popularly regarded as having served their purpose (see Chapter 1). In

media terms, this new approach to 'race relations' in general and Black arts in particular was

complemented by and resulted in, the more individualistic, competitive and uncompromising

code of broadcasting practice. The focus, as Givanni went on to observe, began to shift to the

'New Technology' as if this was something extricable from 'Black issues', implying that 'black

concerns are simply part of a pre-modern 'politically-correct' world and therefore do not

feature in the Future' (ibid.).

Nadine Marsh Edwards describes how the Channel 4 bubble burst, bringing an end to the

support that Sankofa had received from the Independent Film and Video Department:

> we were determined to make the best of it we could for as long as it lasted.
> We just didn't realise how quickly it was going to be over...We suddenly
> kept being told about a 'mixed economy' and we had to learn a new
> 'Thatcher-speak' language. Funding for our infrastructure became less and
> less by the late 1980s. First the GLC funding stopped and then Channel 4
> funding stopped around 1990. (Nadine Marsh-Edwards in Hood, 1994:202-3)

Although the specific reasons for the demise of the Black workshops needs to be considered,

this also needs to take account of wider cultural, political and economic shifts which led to the

fragmentation of the independent workshop structure *in general*.[22] Some have argued that the

workshops could have done more to sustain themselves. Henry Martin suggests:

> The fact that there were no independent structures that could stand the
> withdrawal of funding suggests to me that they had no real vision of the
> future, they were along for the ride but they had no real vision...both in terms

of how you organise for the long-term and also in terms of the continual

aesthetic development in this area. (Martin, interview with Malik, 16.5.96)

Imruh Bakari meanwhile, suggests that there was also a sense of economic paternalism and

control remaining in the hands of those outside of the Black community, and that it was this

which ultimately led to the disintegration of the Black workshops. He argues:

> The workshops were a failure in the sense that they are indicative of why
>
> Black institutions fail because we look outside of ourselves for the
>
> sustenance...The workshops were totally dependent on the whims and
>
> agendas of institutions and individuals outside of the Black
>
> community...there was always this notion that it was totally dependent on
>
> what Channel 4 saw as expedient at that time and what the BFI and other
>
> intellectuals saw as the acceptable or legitimate kinds of opposition at that
>
> time. (Bakari, interview with Malik, 10.12.96)

Perhaps it is only possible to judge the workshops as a failure if one had presumed that they

would last forever, or that there was no end to the funding which was initially received. They

can therefore be considered as befitting and a success *for their time*. The workshops, as they

had existed in their original form, signalled a truly exciting cultural moment, not least because it

was, in fact, through them that the first 'Black-British' films (**Handsworth Songs** and **The**

Passion of Remembrance) received theatrical release in West End London venues: a

testament to the fact of how marginalised Black-British film had been within mainstream

'British film culture' up until then (Mercer, 1994:75). The influence of many of the workshop

films on successive Black-British cultural workers and the subsequent film achievements of

some of the workshops' original members such as John Akomfrah, Isaac Julien and Nadine

Marsh-Edwards further highlighted their importance.

Section 3: The Difference of Black-British Films in the 1980s

In this section, I want to look specifically at the types of films which came out of the socioeconomic context I have just outlined. I will not provide detailed synopsis or case studies of the films, but will highlight some of the films' aesthetic and political concerns and map out some of the debates around them. Perhaps the first thing worth noting, is that what all these films shared was a sense of *difference*; of being *different* from the mainstream, *different* to other/dominant race relations discourses and using *different* approaches. Two other obvious distinctions were, firstly, the assertion here of the Black subject as an active voice and player, both within the text and as a controller of the image; and secondly, the clear movement from television to film as the key enunciator, as it had been for over four decades, of discourses around 'race'. The 'official' 'master narratives' of race relations had, as Mercer argues, 'positioned Black subjects as 'problems' or 'victims', always as some intractable and unassimilable Other on the margins of British society and its collective consciousness' (Mercer, 1994:82). Of course, this entire project has been about examining the character of those dominant, mainstream approaches, but what a number of Black-British artists began to do in the 1980s, having witnessed that legacy, was to answer back and recode (in a different way from their predecessors), both theoretically and practically, what Black Britain and 'race relations' meant to them. Thus, most Black independent film-makers' working practice, thematic preoccupations and aesthetic approaches were now overwhelmingly different to those of the medium (television) that they now found themselves intimately (albeit materially) related to.

This notion of difference could also be related to what mainstream, British cinema was doing at the time. Indeed, the concept of a 'dominant' versus an 'alternative' or 'independent' cinema

needed to involve a consideration of what the latter was independent of. If there was any one thing which defined classic British cinema of the 1980s, then it was its quintessential Englishness, its nostalgia for an old England and the prevalence of Whiteness in the images it produced. Even those few films which did feature what were supposed to be Indian characters chose White actors to play lead parts (for example, Ben Kingsley in **Gandhi** (1982) and Alec Guiness in **A Passage To India** (1984) (see Chapter 8 on actors 'blacking up'). Films such as **Chariots of Fire** (1981) and **A Room With A View** (1986) were all clear examples, along with television dramas such as **Jewel In The Crown**, of eighties' heritage texts (see Higson, 1996:232-248) which took a 'settled' conception of English identity for granted.[23] Many Black-British films however, began to challenge the structure of the 'master' narratives of race relations as a Black/White configuration in favour of a new politics of locating the Black-British subject *within* Black communities and settings; so that 'Whiteness' was no longer the dramatic or narrative centre around which 'Blackness' was based. Moreover, the independent ideal on which a lot of Black films were based, meant that there was no apparent need to obscure ideological motivations and thus, most of these films were explicit in registering and foregrounding various ideological and political themes in relation to the critique of 'Englishness' and the newly emerging or shifting (sexual, racial, class and cultural) identities. The agendas, politics and content of a lot of these films, did in fact, reveal a real paradox in the relationship between economic context and ideological content. Many Black film-makers were quite clearly 'biting the hand that fed them' by explicitly registering critiques of British society in their films. This was not only particular to the workshop films, as was revealed in the production notes of the feature-film, **Sammie and Rosie Get Laid** (Dir: Stephen Frears, 1987), where Hanif Kureishi pointed to the anxiety of 'collaborating' with the ideologies of Thatcherism:

Frears slightly miffed by the realisation of how much Thatcher would approve

of us: we're thrifty, enterprising, money-making small business. I say: But

part of our purpose is to make popular films which are critical of British

society. He says: Thatcher wouldn't care about that, she'd just praise our

initiative for doing something decent despite the odds; the real difficulty of

making film in Britain today made more difficult by this government.

(Kureishi, 1988:72-3)

a) Debating the Films

Feature films such as **My Beautiful Laundrette** (Dir: Stephen Frears, 1985), **Burning An**

Illusion (Dir: Menelik Shabazz, 1981, 1st Tx:7.5.84), the second feature to be financed by the

BFI, and a Sankofa film **The Passion of Remembrance** (Dir: Isaac Julien and Maureen

Blackwood, 1986) were considered to be oppositional to, and independent of, mainstream

constructions of race and nation. In addition, the 'art house' feel of many of these films and

others such as **Dreaming Rivers** (Dir: Martine Attille, 1988, Channel 4, Ist Tx:21.11.88),

Territories (Dir: Isaac Julien, 1984), **Testament** (Dir: John Akomfrah, 1989) and **Looking**

For Langston (Dir: Isaac Julien, 1989) also signalled a radical departure from the formal realist

aesthetics of the 'master' race relations narratives and from the 'cinema of duty' films of the

1970s.[24] Borrowing from the Bahktinian concept of dialogics, Mercer argues that what had

emerged in this body of work, was,

the critical difference between a *monologic* tendency in black film which tends

to homogenize and totalize the black experience in Britain, and a *dialogic*

tendency which is responsive to the diverse and complex qualities of our

black Britishness and British blackness - our differentiated specificity as a

diaspora people. (Mercer in Cham 1988:50)

Of course, we can't simply align the *monologic* with being less 'progressive' because realist, or the *dialogic* with innovation because anti-realist. For example, films such as **Brothers in Trouble** (Dir: Udayan Prasad, 1995)[25] made in collaboration with BBC2's Screen Two, and for that matter, **A Private Enterprise**, both used the social-realist mode to present the British-Asian 'immigrant experience' with evocative and dramatic effect. Nevertheless, there is a case for arguing that one of the main things which was different, radical and provocative about 'the *dialogic* set' was its break with the attempt to 'totalise the black experience in Britain' and that one of the ways of doing this was through the use of an anti-realist aesthetic. What was also unquestionably emerging here - and in other areas of popular culture - was a more diverse definition of 'the Black experience', and a growing notion of dialogue and exchange between different (new and old, White and Black produced, dominant and marginal) representations and experiences of the Black-British diaspora (see Chapters 1 and 6 on diaspora aesthetics and the 'cultures of hybridity').

Retrospectives of Black-British film practice have, however, tended to categorise *all* films to come out of this period as alternative to dominant images of Blackness. Although this might have been the intention of most of the projects (as is indicated by most of the film-makers themselves) and the genuine effect of some, there were, I would argue, a number of Black films which explicitly failed to be 'oppositional' or break with the stereotypes on which the majority of Black representations had so far been based. During the late 1980s, some began to contest that Black-produced work was always different from the types of images, politics and themes which had always circulated around discourses of 'race'. It was indeed, the differing perceptions of what constitutes 'failure' and 'success', 'negative' and 'positive' which opened up a number of debates around authorship, race and representation (see Chapters 1, 3 and 8).

The 'Black Film, British Cinema' Conference at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London

in 1988 was instrumental in highlighting some of these diverse and often contradictory

responses to the 'new wave' of Black-British film. Most importantly, this varied critical

reception revealed four main things. First, that Black audiences were heterogeneous, active and

sometimes resistant to formal innovation. Secondly, 'the recognition of the extraordinary

diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the

category 'black' (Hall, 1988:28). Thirdly, that we had transcended the 'siege mentality which

says that anything we do must be good' (Henriques in Mercer, 1988:18). And finally, that the

cinema had become, in Mercer's words, ' a crucial arena of cultural contestation' (Mercer,

1994:73).[26]

Many Black creative artists found themselves defending their own work (against criticisms of

them not reflecting the reality of 'the Black experience') on the grounds that they were

consciously railing against the formal and ideological constraints and conventions of dramatic

or documentary realism(s); that they wanted to find new ways of approaching Black

characterisation, stories and themes without professing that their films corresponded to a

particular reality.[27] Realism was proving to be a particularly messy, 'can't live with/can't live

without' construct within the context of Black-produced work, highlighting how what was

dominantly referred to as 'the realist aesthetic', also held its own limitations, contradictions

and indeed, differences. Black artists were alternately accused of either making work that was

'unrepresentative' and thus 'unrealistic' or of suggesting that there was a single

reality/monolithic Black experience which could be reflected. In short, many Black audiences

were critical of being 'misrepresented' while also resenting that they could be represented in

any one way. As John Akomfrah of Black Audio argued:

We knew that you can't just 'tell it like it is', that it wasn't just an

ethnographic issue of finding hidden stories and making them available.

That's what television had mainly done - to see race as the dark continent of

our media culture, so that anything about black people becomes like a voyage

of anthropological discovery. From the word go, there was always this

tension between the desire to make a progressive cultural and political

statement about race, and the desire to delineate a mode of practice which

wasn't one anchored in conventional documentary or social-realist film-

making. (Akomfrah in Petley, 1989:261)

In revealing 'the nature of the problems of representation created by the hegemony of

documentary realism in racial discourse' (Mercer, 1988:11) many filmic explorations at this

time focused on race, identity, history and memory. At the same time, in a culture in which

diverse visual images of Blackness are so rare, many Black film-makers found themselves

weighed down by new pressures to solve all the problems of Black representation at once

(Mercer, 1994). As Martine Attille, then of Sankofa, explained:

There is a sense of urgency to say it all, or at least to signal as much as we

could in one film. Sometimes we can't afford to hold anything back for

another time, another conversation or another film. That is the reality of our

experience - sometimes we only get the *one* chance to make ourselves heard.

(Attille in Pines, 1986:101)

b) CASE STUDY 1: Handsworth Songs and My Beautiful Laundrette

Handsworth Songs (Dir: John Akomfrah, 1986), Black Audio's first film and arguably the

most significant documentary of the 1980s, not only complicated the whole question of how

positive and negative images were constructed but brought into question the very premise on

which those representations were based. It shifted the focus from *what* the text represented to

how and *why* it represented it. Black Audio, like many other film-makers at this time, displayed a certain kind of self-reflexivity about the corporeal aspects of representation. So that for example, in **Handsworth Songs**, we repeatedly heard the phrase, "There are no stories...only the ghosts of other stories." **Handsworth Songs** unhinged the traditional race relations narrative by using a layered texture with interweaving news footage from the 1985 Handsworth riots, archival newsreels of Black historiography and a general 'cut 'n' mix' style. Like Isaac Julien's **Territories** (1984), **Handsworth Songs** explicitly broke from the passive notion in the tradition of British actuality programming of the camera as a tool of authority which was simply there to tell an objective truth (see Chapters 2 and 4). In 'the struggle...to find a new language' (Hall in Mercer, 1988:17), **Handsworth Songs** focused on the problem of representation over the problem of race. Moreover, in developing several non-linear paths, and alternative viewpoints, the film dislodged the central and marginal positions of subject and viewer, thus offering an unsettling yet pleasurable viewing experience for audiences reared on monotone riot documentaries (for a range of responses to the film see Mercer (1988) and particularly the debate between Rushdie and Hall in *The Guardian*).

Black Audio's resourcefulness in using a multitude of discourses and modes of cultural representation in one text, added to its innovative approach to representing difference in the television documentary genre. As Dick Hebdige notes:

> In films such as Handsworth Songs and Territories the film-makers use
> everything at their disposal: the words of Fanon, Foucault, CLR James, TV
> news footage, didactic voiceover, interviews and found sound, the dislocated
> ghostly echoes of dub reggae, the scattergun of rap - in order to assert the fact
> of difference. (Hebdige, 1987:48)

(We can relate this using 'everything at their disposal' to those cultural formations in the music and youth Black-British subcultural scenes at this time.) Given that the limited space for creating competing, complex and diverse Black characters within the same text meant that few Black films went without criticism, **Handsworth Songs** also received some for, amongst other things, not 'coming to any concrete solutions as to the way forward' (*Caribbean Times* critic, quoted in Petley, 1989:261).

My Beautiful Laundrette was a pivotal text in continuing some of these debates. Although **Laundrette** was made for Channel 4 (commissioned by Film Four International with a budget of £650,000) it followed with a highly successful cinema release and became one of the few British-Asian films not only to enter Black arts criticism but also to be used as a central case study in debates about British national cinema.[28] Moreover, it proved that issues such as class, race, homosexuality, miscegenation and racism could be addressed within what was essentially a comi-tragic (and immensely 'watchable') love story. The film was praised by many precisely for script-writer Hanif Kureishi's refusal to create 'one dimensional, positive images'. But there could be no uniform agreement about what constituted a 'positive image'. Keith Vaz, for instance, argued that the images of Asians it portrayed were 'too positive - there were no poor Asians in the film, Asians living on the margins of poverty, which is what we have in this country' (Vaz, cited from **Saturday Review**, BBC2, Tx:16.11.85). Mahmood Jamal, on the other hand, perceived those same images as too negative, with the emphasis on 'money grabbing, scheming, sex-crazed people' (Jamal, 1985). As such, the 'British-Asianness' of **My Beautiful Laundrette** over-determined most approaches to it. The most publicised responses to the film refused to see it as anything but a piece of realism, or the characters as determined by anything other than their ethnic identity (it bears repetition here that realism itself is utterly

subjective and itself an aesthetic; it serves, as all aesthetic discourses do, to make sense of reality). Interestingly Kureishi, in characteristic style, insisted that, 'At the moment, everything is so horrific that if you wrote straight social realism people wouldn't be able to watch it' (Kureishi, *Sight and Sound,* 1985/6:67).

My Beautiful Laundrette was, for a number of reasons, an exceptional British film. Other 'practicing' British-Asian film-makers of the time were generally continuing to work in the documentary or social-realist tradition (**Living In Danger**, Dir: Ahmed A.Jamal, Retake; **Channel 4/Eleventh Hour**, Tx:13.8.84, **Hotel London**, Dir: Ahmed A. Jamal, BBC2, Tx:18.12.89).[29] The tenacious investment in the notion of ethnic identity, the use of the realist mode and the dependence on the visual image with minimal use of dialogue in films such as **A Kind of English** (Dir: Ruhul Amin, 1986) were all important aesthetic and political trademarks of 1980s British-Asian films. The first British-Asian feature film to emerge from the workshop sector was **Majdhar** (Dir: Ahmed A. Jamal, 1984, **Channel 4/Eleventh Hour**, Tx:18.3.85) by the Retake Film Collective.

Retake, as the first Asian film and video collective, became a fully franchised workshop in 1984 and defined itself as a group of Asians, 'who felt that there was an urgent need to challenge the stereotyped images of black people in the media' (**Majdhar** publicity leaflet). **Majdhar**, like earlier British-Asian films such as **Mirror, Mirror** (Dir: Yugesh Walia, Birmingham Film and Video Workshop, 1980), was organised around a female protagonist who underwent a gradual change of consciousness. In these two films (and in the later examples of **My Sister Wife**, Dir: Lesley Manning, 1992 and **Flight**, Dir: Alex Pillai/Frances-Anne Solomon, BBC2 Tx:25.1.98),[30] 'progression' tended to be measured in terms of how

'Westernised' or 'British' the Asian female subject became. In **Majdhar,** once Fauzia, the decentred protagonist, was 'freed' by her Pakistani husband, she was able to embark on a journey from dependence to independence. As such, **Majdhar** had an explicitly assimilationist project. The Fauzia we first met, wearing traditional Indian dress, represented powerlessness, silence and lack whereas the 'new' Fauzia was free to wear 'Western' clothes, work, and date English men. Fauzia opted for British middle-class culture and adapted her identity accordingly. As well as reiterating racist ideologies which align the East with oppression and the West with freedom, this 'between two cultures' film also revealed how social realism as a mode of enunciation can be limiting when dealing with the complexities of identity for the diasporic subject.

Section 4: Black-British Film in the 1990s

a) "Crossing Over"

By the early 1990s, the cheaper (to produce and screen) short film format had become the dominant and most accessible form of film-making for Black-British practitioners. Although there are TV slots which showcase short films such as S/He-Play (Channel 4), **Short and Curlies** (Channel 4), 10X10 (BBC2) and the late-night themed short-film zone **The Shooting Gallery** (Channel 4), the short film form continues to be generally undervalued. Apart from television, there is no economy in the industry for short films, although some of these TV slots (for example **Short and Curlies** which is filmed on 35mm) have served as a useful testing-ground for directors with feature projects which they want television to fund. Various schemes such as **Black Screen/Siren Spirits** (BBC/BFI), **Synchro Projects** (Carlton/Arts Council) and Crucial Films' **Funky Black Shorts** and **Crucial Tales**, were specifically set up for Black-British film-makers to work on short films for television. The first such scheme was the

Arts Council's Black Arts Video Project which was established in the late 1980s and went on

to fund a number of shorts. Other development initiatives have included Screenwrite,

established in 1994 by Henry Martin (formerly of Kuumba productions) with Ceddo.[31] This

is a programme designed to train Black scriptwriters and is run in association with the London

Film and Video Development Agency, the BFI and initially with Film on Four and now with

British Screen (see Chapter 8).[32]

Alongside the television developments (and setbacks) of the first half of the 1990s, a number

of Black-British feature films reached national, and in some cases, international acclaim. **Young**

Soul Rebels (Dir: Isaac Julien, Channel 4/BFI, 1991), **Wild West** (Dir: David Attwood/1992;

script by Harwant Baines, Channel 4, Tx:22.11.94) and **Bhaji On The Beach** (Dir: Gurinder

Chadha,[33] 1994/Channel 4, Tx:12.12.96) were the first Black-British features since **My**

Beautiful Laundrette to 'cross over' from relatively selective, small-scale, art-house

audiences to larger, more varied, commercial ones.[34] They were all partially funded by and

screened on Channel 4. Each of these films made an explicit break from the aesthetic and

ideological principles of the earlier 'cinema of duty' films, partly through their emphasis on

fantasy and anti-realism (although this of course, was also to develop in different ways). They

were each multilayered and complex, in terms of narrative, genre, style and film form. As such

they rendered redundant the dual 'social problem/victim' stereotype as well as those race

relations discourses which depended on the rigid dichotomies of Black versus White, negative

versus positive, representative versus unrepresentative, realism versus fantasy and so on. Each

of these films - and we can add to the list the BBC's four-part serialisation of Hanif Kureishi's

The Buddha of Suburbia (BBC2, Tx:3.11.93-24.11.93) (see Chapter 8) - in dealing with the

evolution of a myriad of fluid, complex and sometimes conflicting identities, realised and

profiled 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential Black subject' (Hall in Mercer

1988:28). They also used the strategy of subverting typically British modes of audience

address, so that it was the Black members of the audience that were more likely to understand

the codes, language and jokes that the film employed, thus dislodging 'central' expectations

both of what British films and British audiences constitute. So, for example, in **Bhaji**, some of

the fantasy sequences alluded to Indian cinematic films and the characters occasionally slipped

in Punjabi jokes or references which only the Punjabi-literate Asian viewer would grasp - but

not to such an extent as to alienate other viewers.

Many of these productions (and I am thinking mainly of **Young Soul Rebels** and **Buddha**),

through their focus on the music, cultural and style politics of specific historical moments, also

shifted the focus from the political to the cultural arena by interweaving the 'politics of race'

with the 'politics of the dance-floor', the former inextricably related to the latter. In this sense,

they used the popular culture terrain to bridge the gap between academic critiques of

essentialism and the lived reality of difference. In dealing with and reaching the popular, they

encouraged a more applicable and accessible reading of 'otherness' compared to those applied

in a lot of areas of Cultural Studies and to those produced in the majority of films prior to the

1990s. This is not to suggest that film practice and critical practice are exchangeable entities,

but that new Black film practices, in dealing with community, identity and social action in new

ways, have helped us make sense of more complex notions of ethnicity, Third Cinema[35] and

the Black diasporic experience which have been so central to critical discourse in recent years.

b) CASE STUDY 2: British-Asian Films in the 1990s - Beyond 'Between Two Cultures': Wild West and Bhaji On The Beach

I have argued elsewhere how British-Asian film has been marginalised (both critically and

institutionally) within an already culturally marginalised Black-British film sector and that

while there are important similarities, there are also significant differences between the

experiences and films of Asian and African-Caribbean film practitioners (Malik, 1996). The

1990s have so far seen some important contributions made by British-Asian film-makers and I

want to consider some of these here. The Channel 4 feature, **Wild West**, profiled Zaf Ayub

(Naveen Andrews), a young British-Asian growing up in Southall. The narrative, rather than

following the realist trajectory so central to British-Asian film practice, was drawn as fantasy

largely through the depiction of Southall as a lawless, neon-lit frontier town and its inhabitants

as more complex than the 'between two cultures' text has formally allowed. **Wild West**

deconstructed the models offered by the 'between two cultures' films, which see only three

possible paths for the British-Asian subject to follow - a journey to the heartland of Britain, a

return to the Indian subcontinent or a confused in-between state. **Wild West** provided a fourth

option, represented by the fantasy of 'Nashville', which pointed to the indeterminacy and

impossibility of clearly categorising Black-British identity. **Wild West** repudiated an essential

racial identity, offered fluctuating points of identification and emphasised questions of

performance and pastiche. Music provided Zaf and his Country and Western band, the Honky

Tonk Cowboys, with a distinct but demythified voice and spirit. They dreamt of success and

Nashville, but others demanded they "bring back the Bhangra." Zaf's mother meanwhile

(played by Lalita Ahmed), represented an extreme condition of alienated and isolated

individualism. Blinded by her nostalgic desire for her 'imagined homeland' of Pakistan, she

could not entertain the idea that an authentic return to an unproblematised homeland was

impossible.

Like **Wild West, Bhaji On The Beach** (the first feature film to be directed by an Asian

woman in Britain) was a Channel 4 British-Asian film which really could be taken on its own terms as a more or less successful fiction.[36] British-Asian identity was not dwelt on in the film, it just was. At the same time, the fact of Asianness was not naturalised and assimilation was not urged as a solution. Like **Wild West, Bhaji** incorporated comic elements in the narrative, thus combining slapstick **Carry On-**style humour with high drama. Just as **Young Soul Rebels** could be seen as part thriller, part disaffected youth drama, part love story, **Bhaji's** generic positioning was equally ambiguous. It was part soap opera, part road movie, part romantic comedy, while also borrowing from the British realist tradition and Bombay popular cinema (particularly **Bajju Bawara** (Dir: Vijay Bhatt, 1952) and **Purab Aur Pachhim/East Or West** (Dir: Manoj Kumar, 1970)).[37] In exploring the generational, class, political and personal differences within a group of nine Asian women on a day trip to the seaside, **Bhaji** depicted the reality of Asian women's heterogeneous and often complex lives and desires. In the melodrama of other female-centred British-Asian films such as **A Nice Arrangement** (Dir: Gurinder Chadha, 1989), **Majdhar, Mirror Mirror, My Sister Wife** and **Flight**, Asian women have been confined (in their 'Asian state') to the 'private' space of the home. Here, we saw the ensemble of Asian women temporarily inhabit a public sphere (Blackpool Beach) which is predominantly associated with 'Englishness' and 'Whiteness'. This centre of 'Englishness' was juxtaposed with the 'Indianness' of the female protagonists, both culturally and visually, although this 'Indianness' was not represented as just one thing. Furthermore, we did not get the sense that any one culture had 'crossed over' or been assimilated by another, but that new, hybrid forms of cultural identity were emerging, a 'third space'. For example, through the story of Hashida (Sarita Khajuria) who found herself pregnant by her Black boyfriend, Oliver (Mo Sesay), 'Whiteness' was usurped as the cultural and narrative centre. Hashida, both because she was part of a mixed relationship with a

difference (a Black rather than White racial other) and because she successfully worked it through with her partner, despite obvious opposition (thus not reproducing the dramatic conclusion we have come to expect from the 'doomed' mixed relationship yarn), reminded us that multicultural Britain is not just a White/Black thing, but about a number of different ethnic and cultural identities negotiating their positions with one another.

In these senses, **Bhaji** can be viewed as having made significant advances in terms of representing 'race' in general and South Asian women in particular. However, I would also argue that **Bhaji** did not do enough to break with common-sense attitudes toward Asian femininity and to some degree, did in fact perpetuate certain codes associated with the South Asian diaspora. We have already seen, with the examples of **Mirror Mirror, Majdhar** and **Flight**, how the female characters were oppressed by 'Asianness' and were only deemed independent when they eliminated these aspects of culture from their lives. Similarly, we can say that despite the radical difference of texts such as **Laundrette** and **Buddha**, the actuality of Asianness as a fluid identity was only really related to their male characters. Indeed critical accounts of **Laundrette** in particular, have tended to focus exclusively on the Johnny/Omar relationship without considering how the film presented its female characters. Omar's cousin, Tania (Rita Wolf), as the film's main Asian female, was 'offered' to Omar by his Uncle Nasser (Saeed Jaffrey) and subsequently ran away from home finding herself unable to assert her obvious need for independence within *her* male-dominated Asian family structure. And in **Buddha**, Jamila (Nisha Nayar) fluctuated between independence (in her pre-marital state when she was vocal and political) and submission (agreeing to an arranged marriage to please her dying father) and finally again, independence (when her father died and she was able to move to a commune where she could 'be herself'). As in **Majdhar**, these distinctions between

submission and independence were defined in relation to the poles of 'Asianness' and

'Englishness' respectively and these were marked through certain codes such as dress, posture

and language.

While **Bhaji** did broaden the repertoire of British-Asian femininity, as well as diversifying its

setting and playing with genre, it also returned to the basic logic that most Asian women,

although able to assert their independence in some ways (e.g. answer back to racism), are

ultimately controlled by Asian men and negatively bound by an extended family structure. (In

such instances, it is often useful to 'ground' ourselves by observing what mainstream White

arts critics make of a Black film: thus, one review of **Bhaji** noted, 'the women's domestic

discord is set against the joy they find in a male striptease bar' (*Sunday Express*, 23.1.94).)

This 'domestic discord' was portrayed most predictably in two of the film's central

characters, Asha (Lalita Ahmed), an elderly, married 'Auntie' who lamented the loss of her

college education because of her family commitments and Ginder (Kim Vithana) who took

refuge with her young son to escape her abusive husband. Pointedly, each of these characters

were at the centre of two of the film's fantasy sequences (proving that fantasy alone is not a

guarantee to 'better' representation). In Asha's private moments, she imagined standing before

a Hindu god surrounded by a voice ordering, "duty, honour, sacrifice" and then, "Asha - know

your place". In Blackpool, she was allowed temporarily to escape - helped by Ambrose, a

flirtatious and gallant local. In a different fantasy, Asha imagined a defiant Ginder causing her

mother-in-law to have a heart attack. Ginder, meanwhile, although herself depicted as resisting

her husband's abuse, also believed that it was the extended family structure which ultimately

drove him to violence and the film's final denouement depended on the stereotype of Asian

men as violent, oppressive and possessive. I maintain these criticisms not because I expect all

Black-produced texts to nullify *all* stereotypical representations of Black people, but simply

to argue that an 'oppositional' or innovative text can be considered so, despite the stereotypes

it might produce.

Conclusion

In foregrounding notions of identity and community, Black-British films - as seen on television

- have diversified and enriched not only the concept of British cinema and television, but also

the entire notion of Britishness. There has been an increasing desire, by Black-British film-

makers, to re-examine ideas of British national identity without becoming nationalist. As

Thomas Elsaesser points out, 'British films...have been rather successful in marketing and

packaging the national literary heritage, the war years, the countryside, the upper classes and

elite education, and in doing so have also succeeded in constructing and circulating quite

limiting and restricting images of 'Britishness'' (Elsaesser, 1984:208). In recent Black-British

films, that limited and restricted agenda has been challenged and discarded. Now, we have the

image of Johnny licking Omar's neck in front of his fascist thug-like gang (**My Beautiful**

Laundrette), we have an old Indian woman on Blackpool beach gleefully sprinkling chili

powder on her fish and chips (**Bhaji**), and we have two Black men dancing over a

superimposed image of a burning Union Jack (**Territories**). We have been offered a version of

Britishness that does not necessarily belong to the English. In redefining what is assumed to be

unchangeable (and has remained remarkably static on British television), Black film producers

have challenged the concept of identity itself as a fixed core. Recent Black film-makers have

refused to be bound by a rigid national boundary or singular definitions of cultural, ethnic or

national identities.

Whilst it is not difficult to see the cultural significance of new Black-British film, particularly

within the context of this research, it is also necessary to remind ourselves how few and far

between these productions are. As June Givanni argues, 'to be clear about the problems facing

those involved in exhibiting black film, we have to acknowledge the fact that we are not talking

about a quantitatively substantial body of work, however innovative and challenging it is in

qualitative terms' (Givanni in Mercer, 1988:40). Furthermore, while the growth of an

independent television sector might have given rise to many of these films, today's

broadcasting climate stands in total contradiction to the dominant ethos of independent film-

makers, which is to prioritise cultural, social and political concerns over commercial ones (see

Chapter 10). The major question today is 'Who is going to watch these films?' - a question

with direct reference to audience-size, ratings and box-office success and directly related to the

vexed issue of distribution. Although recent years have seen a rise in the number of exhibition-

screens, a handful of British films making an international impact and new sources of

investment such as the National Lottery funds,[38] these changes have so far done very little to

help independent distributors compete in a US-dominated market-place (Dyja, 1997:17-18).

The money made available by the National Lottery Funds for Film Production and Arts For

Everyone (which emphasises art films) is strictly monitored, difficult to get access to and

arguably granted to those films which are likely to attract the biggest audiences (see Hughes,

Black Film Bulletin, Summer/Autumn, 1997:18-19). The fact of low ratings for 'specialised'

work (of which Black-British films are usually seen to be a part) also means that broadcasters

are reluctant to pay distributors (who rely on TV to buy the rights). Although it is clear that

Channel 4 still sometimes gets a kick out of difference, that difference (across all genres)

remains highly policed and, with the odd exception, tailor-made for as big as possible

audiences. Black film-makers are still considered as 'minority artists', not an easy position

from which to negotiate when trying to survive in the free market.[39] Black film, no matter how

essentially British some of us realise it is, is still considered marginal, and successes such as

Laundrette and **Bhaji** are lucky exceptions to that rule. If the big powers see far enough to

realise that a particular Black production might make some money, then it might be invested in

- but there are a lot of 'ifs' and 'mights'. As Isaac Julien notes, 'If we translate that racial

'difference' to feature film production in Britain, then who is going to be in the relative

positions of power to visually portray 'difference' and 'otherness' in the cinema? The

cinematic commodification of the 'Other' does not necessarily mean that black directors will

have opportunities to tell our own stories' (Julien in Givanni, 1995:58).[40]

The fact is, that questions of reception play a dominant role in decisions about what form

British film culture should take. This is not just a matter of who the film will attract but more

fundamentally of whether or not the film will be funded at all, if it is not expected to attract a

significant number of viewers. These presumptions remain deeply tied up with notions of

'race'. As Snead noted, 'reception can even pre-empt or censor the actual production' so that

the central questions remain of 'what kinds of statements and images will a society tolerate,

and where will it tolerate them, and with what frequency?' (Snead, 1994:126). We also have to

note how male-oriented the area of exchange about 'Black-British film' and how male-centred

so many of the narratives have been. From **Pressure** and **A Private Enterprise** through to

Wild West and **Buddha**, it is Black men who are seen at the centre of 'oppositional'

articulations of the Black experience. **Bhaji** of course is a welcome exception, although, as I

have indicated, this is not without its own problems in terms of the way both South Asian

femininity and masculinity are drawn.

Broadly speaking, there is less room for experimentation today as compared with the 1970s

and early 1980s, though the 'sense of urgency' and obligation to make a 'Black film' still

undoubtedly remains. With the 1980s ethos of collective and integrated practice having given

way to a more individualistic and independent production culture, it would appear that we

have come full circle; without public funds, many of today's Black-British film-makers are

being forced to subsidise their own productions, just as the Black-British film-makers of the

1960s and 1970s had to do. In some cases, many of those who cultivated the Black-British

film movement of the 1980s are, at best, having to pause and take stock of the changing

situation in order to survive or, at worst, being left behind since they lack the funds to survive

in today's increasingly competitive broadcasting and exhibition environment. Although creative

power has clearly emerged from diasporic difference, Black film-makers are still struggling

against the limits of pounds, policy and pressure.

NOTES

[1] There were many other early British films which represented Black people and issues such as If Youth But Knew (1926), The Drum (1938), King Solomon's Mines (1937), Sapphire (1959) and Flame In The Streets (1961). I am focusing on films within a specifically televisual context and therefore at those made from the late-1970s, since this is when the direct relationship between the two mediums first emerged on a significant basis (see Young (1996) and Pines (1997) for more on these early films).

[2] The BFI's compilation 'Black By Popular Demand' brought together various Black-British films on a single video format. 'Black From The Past' contains, Jemima and Johnny (UK, 1966, Dir and Scr: Lionel Ngakane), Baldwin's Nigger (UK, 1969, Dir: Horace Ove) and A Lesson In History (UK, 1990, Dir: Maybelle Peters).

[3] As film-maker Alan Parker (and newly-appointed chairman of the BFI) reminds us, his generation's approach to film has been highly influential in shaping the work of future British film-makers and televison's approach to film (Media Guardian, 27.10.97, 8-9).

[4] Pressure, although funded by the BFI was initially not screened for over a year by the BFI because, according to Imruh Bakari it 'was considered to be a bad representative of Britain or unrepresentative of Black life in Britain or a British response to Black life... Then Notting Hill happened and everybody else said 'Oh, we'd better look at Pressure then, Pressure is mild considering what 'happened down in The Grove in those few years' (Bakari, interview with Malik, 10.12.96).

[5] Norman Beaton was named Best Actor by the Variety Cub of Great Britain for his performance in Black Joy, marking the first such award to go to a Black-British actor.

[6] In the late-1940s, the Indian League (part of the Indian Independence Lobby), promoted Anglo-Asian relations, by screening English-subtitled Indian films to mainly English audiences in London. During the 1950s and 1960s, approximately 200 Asian-owned cinemas screened Indian films.

[7] I have looked at the politics leading up to the formation of Channel 4 in some detail in Chapter 3/Section 2.

[8] Cassie McFarlane was named the Most Promising Newcomer by the Evening Standard British Film Awards in 1982 following her appearance in **Burning An Illusion**. For critiques of this film, see Attille & Blackwood and Sayers & Jayamanne in Brunsdon, 1986.

[9] As well as those films which I refer to in the main text that were screened in these two strands, there were a number of other Black-British films screened in them including **On Duty** (Cassie McFarlane, Tx:16.4.84), the four-part **Struggles For Black Community** (Colin Prescod, Tx:15/22/29.8.84, 5.9.84), **I Am Not Two Islands** (Milton Bryan, Tx:16.8.84), **Flame in my Heart** (Ruhul Amin, Tx:23.9.84) and **They Haven't Done Nothing** (Liverpool Black Media Group, Tx:7.7.85).

[10] See Chapter 1 for how these struggles were not simply based around the arts but also highlighted in other political movements, not least in the 'race riots' of the 1970s and early 1980s which influenced arts policy.

[11] I would particularly like to thank Imruh Bakari for sharing his insight and opinions on the history of Black-British film.

[12] Despite this, Barry Norman on reviewing the film argued that Horace Ove, "is black and he knows about black people but he does not know about white people" (quoted by Ove in Mercer, 1988, 57). If nothing else, this comment revealed the level of White, mainstream arts criticism.

[13] Krishnamma has gone on to direct mainstream box-office successes such as **A Man of No Importance** (1994, BBC2 Tx:18.5.96) (like other eminent South Asian film-makers such as Waris Hussain, Ismail Merchant and Jamal Dehlavi). He has also directed for television, including episodes of **Soldier, Soldier** and **A Respectable Trade** (BBC1, Tx:19.4.98-10.5.98), a story about a Bristol slave-merchant, based on a novel by Phillipa Gregory.

[14] Although some better-funded 'Film On Four's were also commercial failures, for example, **Giro City** and **Remembrance.**

[15] To some degree, BBC Drama (under Mark Shivas) began to reassume its position as the prime producer of British television fiction in the early 1990s although few of its ventures could be considered as a contribution to Black-British film. As of now (1997), Channel 4 continues with **Film on Four, Film on Four International** and its short-film slot, **Short and Curlies**.

[16] Most significant in marking this shift was Channel 4's document *TV With A Difference* (1989) and the BFI's revision of its original commitment in the Workshop Declaration in 1991 (see Ross, 1996, 34-37). Also, Channel 4's proposals drawn out in a paper called *Workshops in the Nineties*, written by Alan Fountain, which emphasised the types of products the workshops produced.

[17] In 1998, the ITC announced that by the year 1999, Channel 4 has to commission at least 60% of its programmes and that during peak-time (6.30 p.m. to 10.30 p.m.) they must broadcast a diverse mix of programmes which should include multicultural programmes.

[18] For example, the BFI regional fund which had provided approximately £230,000 to the workshops in its first phase was forced to reduce this to £110,000 in 1989.

[19] A similar trend was echoed by the BBC and ITV. In 1987, the Peacock Committee suggested a minimum 40% quota of independent production to be taken by the BBC and ITV. The 1990 Broadcasting Act forced them to take 25% from outside productions. Many of these (White-led) independent companies such as Barraclough Carey Productions and Humphrey Barclay Productions were the ones to produce so-called 'Black programmes'. Many of these bigger independent producers (e.g. Mentorn and Barraclough Carey) are now merging in order to maintain a strong foothold in the aggressive market-place.

[20] Channel 4's obligation to sell its own advertising was a result of proposals in the Government's parliamentary bill '*Broadcasting in the '90s: Competition, Choice and Quality* (November 1988) (see Paul Giles 'History With Holes: Channel Four Television Films of the 1980s' in Friedman,1993, 70-91:74.

[21] The BFI's African-Caribbean Unit was formed in 1991, with an initial brief to organise the 1992 'Black and White in Colour' conference. The *Black Film Bulletin* which was launched in 1993 by June Givanni and Gaylene Gould, and which has been a vital source of information, debate and exchange for those interested in British and international Black film, continues today (under different editorship).

[22] Some of the original workshops such as Black Audio Film Collective, Sankofa Film and Video and Star Productions still exist, and operate as production companies. Black Audio Films have gone on to produce a number of important documentaries. For example, a biography of Martin Luther King for

BBC2 (1997), and another as part of Channel 4's **Gangsters** series, **The Tragedy of Tupac Shakur** (Tx:16.4.98). In 1995, Black Audio was nominated for the prestigious Prudential Award (Film Category) and was commended for 'Excellence and creativity, innovation and sensibility in the arts'. The Black Media Training Trust and Cultural Partnerships are two other workshops which are geared towards Black production and training. Other such existing production companies are Endboard Productions, Contrast Films, Bandung, First Take and Penumbra Productions.

[23] The fact that films such as **Sense and Sensibility** (1996) have distinctly multicultural origins (a Taiwanese director (Ang Lee), Hollywood distribution and Columbia funding) is still arguably undermined by the discourse of White British authenticity and iconography of Englishness promoted at the level of text and is thus still widely grouped along with 'one of the better kinds of British film' *(Daily Mail* on **Howards End**, 1.5.92, 34).

[24] These new cultural changes contributed to a general fragmentation of the formal avant-garde movement in the 1980s (see Michael O'Pray in Higson, 1996, 178-90.

[25] Prasad has recently directed **My Son, The Fanatic** (1997/BBC) from a screenplay by Hanif Kureishi.

[26] Black-British film continues to be a central focal point of a number of conferences, special seasons and festivals including the Bristol-based Black Pyramid Festival, the Bite The Mango Festival in Bradford and at selected forums in the Birmingham International Film and Video Festival. In December 1995, the ICA screened a retrospective of Black-British film and video entitled 'From Pressure to Terrordome'. This was followed by a conference based on the findings of the London Film and Video Development Agency's (a publicly funded, strategic development body for cultural film and video) research and consultation programme on the training and development needs of Black film-makers (For detailed summary, see London Film and Video News, Issue 5:Nov/Dec 1985/Jan 96: i-iv). The LFVDA is supported by the BFI, Channel 4 and Carlton Television and operates the London Production Fund.

[27] In his essay 'Diaspora Cinema and the Dialogic Imagination', Kobena Mercer prescribed the need for Black film-makers to make a considered break from the realist aesthetic. For more on conventions of realism, see Comolli and Narboni in Nichols,1976, 23-30, and Colin MacCabe 'Realism and the Cinema:Notes on some Brechtian Theses in Bennett et al, 1981, 216-235.

[28] Stephen Frears has argued that by allowing Channel 4 to fund **My Beautiful Laundrette**, more people got a chance to see it (Howkins, 'Edinburgh Television' *Sight and Sound* 54, 4, 1985, 238-9.

[29] For more on British-Asian film, see *Black Film Bulletin*:Navigations/Asian Diaspora Issue, Autumn 1994, Volume 2, Issue 3 which includes my chapter 'Beyond Identity:British Asian film', 12-13, and my interview with Ruhul Amin, 20-21. I have written extensively on British Asian Film in my MA Thesis (unpublished) 'British-Asian Identity in British-Asian Independent Film', Warwick University,1993.

[30] **My Sister Wife** was part of the Screen Two season and winner of the CRE Award for Best TV Drama. Originally an idea by Asmaa Pirzada (a BBC Script Editor) and written by Meera Syal, the film, although notable for its British-Asian female contributions, perpetuated the image of Islam as an oppressive religion and the West or 'being Westernised' as progressive and rational (seen in the character of Farah played by Syal). 'Traditional' Asian woman are represented here as submissive (as represented by Maryam played by Shaheen Khan). Key players in the production of **Flight**, a one-off film-drama, were also Black women. It was written by Tanika Gupta, directed by Frances-Anne Solomon and starred amongst other, Mina Anwar and Meera Syal. However, the film dealt in the recurrent theme of oppressed Asian women and tyrannical Asian fathers and the repercussions of Asian daughters 'running away from home'. Flight, produced by Hindi Pictures, received the award for the Best TV Production at the 1998 inaugural Ethnic Minority Media Awards.

[31] Ceddo, which became franchised in June 1985, was one of the first workshops to close (1994) when its franchise was taken away partly because, according to ACTT, it contravened the declaration by having a number of 'inactive' workers.

[32] Once the Screenwrite scripts are completed, the writers get the opportunity to meet the Heads of Production from the main funders of feature films and television. Prior to this, the writers are in contact with a theatrical agent and told about pitching, costs and the value of an agent.

[33] In 1995, Chadha received the acclaimed *Evening Standard* award for 'Best Newcomer' for **Bhaji**.

[34] Despite its many limitations, **Welcome II The Terrordome** (Dir: Ngozi Onwurah, Channel 4 Tx:25.6.96) might be added to this list although it went without a major theatrical release in the UK. It was however, launched by Metro Pictures and shown in some smaller, 'art cinemas' such as the first

black-owned cinema in Britain, the Electric Cinema which opened in West London in September 1993 (see Givanni and Gould in *The Guardian*, 25.8.93, 6).

[35] The concept of Third Cinema developed in the late-1960s in Latin America following the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the Cinema Novo in Brazil (see Willemen, 1994:175-205). It was originally introduced by Fernand Solanas and Octavio Gettino (see 'Towards a Third Cinema' in Nichols (ed.) *Movies and Methods* (1976), and in the 1980s was related specifically to African Cinema by Teshome Gabriel in 1982 in *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*. Important discussions around Third Cinema were aired at the 3 day 1986 'Towards a Third Cinema' Conference hosted by Jim Pines, Paul Willemen and June Givanni (see Pines and Willemen (1989)).

[36] Channel 4's screening of **Bhaji on the Beach** got 2.1 million viewers (Source:BARB/BFI) and ran for an unprecedented (for a British-Asian film) number of weeks (approx 15) in cinemas across London's West End.

[37] It is interesting how the hybrid genre approach of these films, rather than being praised, has been criticised for 'trying to do too much' (e.g. Ross, 1996:49). When a White director does this (e.g. Mike Leigh in **Secrets and Lies** (1996) or Mike Figgis with **One Night Stand** (1997), they are largely commended for their skill with form.

[38] The Black Media Training Trust is a National Lottery-funded commercial media production facility and training resource for Black media workers.

[39] The British Foreign Office refused to support the exhibition of films such as **Young Soul Rebels** and **Playing Away** at the 1992 Carthage Film Festival in Tunisia because, they argued, they had not seen them and therefore were unrepresentative of British cinema (*The Guardian*, 21.10.92).

[40] This position of power is also held by film critics in Britain who, not surprisingly, tend to be White, middle class men. In a review of **The Square Circle** (Dir: Amol Palekar, 1996) Barry Norman (a key figure in gearing popular cinematic taste on television), spoke of how the film "gives us a brief glimpse of a foreign and exotic culture" (**Film 97**, BBC1, Tx:13.7.97).

Part III

Conclusion

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Chapter Ten

Television, 'Race' and 'Black-Britishness': Summary and Conclusion

The primary concern of this study has been to trace the long, complex and, I hope, enlightening history of Black representation on British television. Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, speaking here about the postcolonial enterprise, notes the possible value of historical work: 'It is too late in the day to get worked up about it or to blame others, much as they deserve such blame and condemnation. What we need to do is to look back and try to find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us' (Achebe in Killam, 1977). Of course, all 'looking back' is essentially interpretative. Therefore, this study is my reading of how television versions of race have been constructed, although I have, where possible, also attempted to provide 'hard evidence' and facts and to discuss other people's opinions on the area of concern.

By referring as much as possible to the wider social, political and cultural contexts, my central argument has been that television programmes are not 'free' and independent, but deeply connected to the presence of Black people and the Black experience in Britain. These programmes are also the product of complex and combined sets of views, experiences and ideas (often unconscious) of programme-makers, the audience and the texts which signify. Hence I have repeatedly argued that, since the text is a mediating factor, those behind the production of programmes have no complete 'hold' on how their audiences subsequently 'read' the text. But I have also suggested that programme-makers do have some degree of responsibility and power in directing their audiences in particular ways. It is the production and decoding of these various meanings and representations which has formed the basis of this study. I have insisted

that television, as a principal signifying system, has considerable and critical powers in shaping

the ways in which we *all* understand the meaning of 'race'. Through the use of the various case

studies I have presented, I have also tried to highlight how meanings around 'race', 'work' in

quite different ways, are never fixed, and are always changing. This, of course, is because

'culture' itself is always in motion.[1] The constant state of cultural flux makes 'culture' not

something which you do or do not have, you can or cannot get, you 'own' or are controlled by,

but something, like politics, which we are all an active part of - even when we are silent or

excluded. Stuart Hall's explanation of cultural hegemony is important here, because he

identifies it as an always shifting, never permanently set, form of cultural leadership. This

'tug-of-war', the struggle between competing ideologies and interests, is precisely what allows

popular cultures to function.[2]

> Cultural hegemony is never about pure victory or pure domination (that's not
>
> what the term means); it is never a zero sum cultural game; it is always about
>
> shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture; it is always about
>
> changing the dispositions and the configurations of cultural power, not
>
> getting out of it. (Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996: 468)

I have maintained then, that the schemes of Black categorisation which we find in British

television, are both arbitrary and imposed. The influence of patterns of choice around

ideologies of 'race' are not a one-way process - they are certainly not simply the reinforcing of

pre-existing views, images or ideologies into a passive culture by the image-makers. Culture

itself, the individuals who 'inhabit' it and the cultural industries which shape it, are all caught

up in a complex 'feed-back loop', with no visible beginning or end, no part of which itself can

be considered in isolation. Thus, the circulation of racist discourses - or discourses which open

themselves up to racist readings - are not necessarily the result of racist-minded producers.

Indeed, as we have seen, they are sometimes the product of those who claim they actually intended to put across an anti-racist message (although this too should not be accepted as unproblematic). We can relate this gap between intention and impact most obviously to **Till Death Us Do Part** and **Fable**, but also to Black-produced texts such as **Majdhar** and **Flight**, and also to some of the work to have come directly out of the Multicultural Programme Departments.

So how is it that 'good, liberal intentions', the dominant paradigm through which British broadcasting 'works', do not always 'match' or manifest themselves in the images thereon produced, or even manage to maintain inequity or work directly against the interests of various sectors of the public? How is it that Black people themselves are often responsible for perpetuating stereotypes of Blackness? How are we to explain a programme such as **The Black and White Minstrel Show** which, while its programme-makers denounced any suggestion that it was racist, *depended on* the use of overt racist stereotypes to make it 'mean'? Similarly, race sitcoms such as **Mind Your Language** and **Love Thy Neighbour** played frivolously with images of race and indeed racism, but their producers argued that they were, in fact, tackling racism by exposing racist caricatures. Although, of course, we can probably identify some of these claims of liberal intent as flimsy alibis (perhaps for something as 'innocent' as wanting to get a programme made or appear on television), conspiracy theories cannot explain so systematic a pattern. Any discussion around these questions needs to consider that (racist) meaning, like (racist) ideology, is a complex of ideas, facts and explanations produced in complicated and often contradictory ways. Representation, being a complicated signifying system, is not reducible to the overt intentions of its producers, nor to any simple or singular set of audience effects.

In this sense, ideological production and circulation can not be considered solely in terms of a

White 'ruling-class' (although in respect to British television, it is mostly staffed by an 'elite'

of White, English, middle-class, men), dominating 'the rest'. Rather, it can more usefully be

treated as a signifying system through which race and society is interpreted and framed via

different modes of production. More useful still would be to see it as a site of struggle,

conflict, and sometimes even agreement between those with often wildly differing viewpoints.

Indeed, the power of popular ideologies of race is such that they have overwhelmingly

administered the terms of the debates around 'race', the types of agendas which are set, the

sorts of stories which are told, and by whom. It is not surprising then, that this history has

revealed some very compelling and repetitive discourses, narratives and images around 'race'

which have, in fact, served to reinforce certain 'common-sense' ideologies of 'race', while also

allowing them to go largely unquestioned.[3]

We have seen that television does not innocently 'represent', but constructs a reality and

'neutrality' of its own. Television plays an essentially interpretative role, which entails always

making active choices and judgments about who, what and how to represent. My basic claim

here falls in line with what could be considered as a 'constructionist' view; that television

constructs meanings around race through its representations. The question of power is central

here, because it distinguishes between those who are central/marginal, those who 'fit' or do

not, and between those who do or do not control the means of production. To determine this,

we need to ask who has the power within the text to be liberal or tolerant? Who has the power

to choose the object of discussion? Who has the power to look? Who's common-sense is

followed? Who is signified as the racial Other? And more obviously, who is the narrator, the

interviewer, the central character, the writer, and so on? In short, who holds the symbolic

power?

In this concluding chapter, I want to begin by drawing together some of the main arguments

which have run through this study. I will consider some of the differences between and

similarities across the different television genres I have examined, but I will mainly try to stand

back from the detail and look at the key representational strategies which have been used to

represent Black and Asian ethnicities on British television. This will involve a wider debate

about culture, ideology and meaning and about how television has produced and popularised

certain readings of 'race' in Britain. In Section 2, I will go on to consider the matter of off-

screen representation, which nevertheless has a bearing on how those ideologies are produced,

and more specifically address questions of employment, training and policy. Although this has

not been the primary focus of the study, I think it is important to consider some of the

questions which media policy raises with specific reference to Black-British media workers

and audiences. It is, in a sense, an attempt to get a grip on the social and material reality of

Black Britons' relationship within the television industry.

Any consideration of the state of Black media workers today and in the future needs to

consider the effects of wider technological, ideological and structural shifts which have affected

the entire industry since the 1980s. The first 'stage' we can relate to the deregulation and

alterations in market forces during the 1980s; and the second (which I will go on to address in

Section 3), to the commercial and cultural impact of digital and satellite TV during the 1990s

and in the future. I will consider whether current technological and global/local shifts pose a

possible threat to the existing framework of broadcasting regulation and to the policy of

'public service broadcasting'. This of course, is an important consideration for anyone who is concerned that terrestrial television continues and extends its commitment to representing and accessing diversity. How Black people are represented, the types of images which they produce and how they are located in relation to different modes of communication, is becoming increasingly important not just on a local, but on a global basis. The question of how global cultural flows are likely to 'work with' and have an impact on differences, national-identities, nation-states and Black diasporic communities is, therefore, critical in relation to the future of Black representation on television.

Section 1: Key Arguments on the Shifting Modalities of On-Screen Blackness

I want to begin by suggesting that there has not been a simple progress model in representations of 'Blackness' on British television. Of course, we can say that there is *more* representation of Black people today and that, broadly speaking, the types of image we now see are more diverse than those which were constructed in the first three or so decades of the medium. There have of course, been certain identifiable junctures, most obviously 1968 and 1981, which triggered important shifts in attitudes towards British race relations but, in general terms, the complex processes within the history would not be given their due degree of weight if they were simply categorised in terms of old=bad/negative and new=good/positive. This equation would deny the presence of early radical texts (such as **All God's Chillun Got Wings, Fable, A Man From The Sun** and **A Private Enterprise**) and overlook remnants of the old in contemporary forms and visions. It would also assume that *more* representation quantitatively (which we clearly have today), is always a *better* thing, rather than noting that putting something on-screen does not in itself, mark 'equality' or 'progression': (To acknowledge that the path of progression has not always escalated, would disrupt notions of a

logical advancement, generally based on heightened 'awareness' and shifts towards pluralist models of behaviour, in terms of how Black and Asian ethnicities are treated.) As bell hooks argues in her general discussion about race and representation, 'the issue is really one of standpoint. From what political perspective do we dream, look, create, and take action?' (hooks, 1992:5). And it is the politics of 'standpoint', position and power that I turn my attention to here.

a) Marking, Exclusion and Social Whiteness

The images of Blackness as depicted on British television over the past sixty or so years, can mostly be categorised in terms of racial types which have been formed either through the representational strategies of stereotyping or exclusion. In this sense, I would argue that what *is* represented is often as important as what *is not*; where and how Black people *are seen* is often as important as where and how they *are not seen*. I would agree then with James Snead's assertion in relation to Black representation in film, that the characterisation of Black people in visual language has depended on what he termed *marking* and *omission* (Snead, 1994). We have seen throughout this study how Asians and African-Caribbeans have been marked and omitted in different historical moments and often in quite disparate ways. Here, of course, we also need to consider the question of where, when and how Whiteness has been represented, since it is through this that we have come to understand what is specific to Whiteness and thus different from its imaginary opposite, Blackness. We can note, for example, that African-Caribbeans are more heavily represented in sport and light entertainment, that Asians are more visible, not so much in whole genres, as in certain narrative discourses such as those of the social problem, the immigrant Other, the cultural alien. Also, that wherever Asians and African-Caribbeans are not, is where Whiteness takes its place. What is particularly striking in

relation to television's notion of 'nationhood' (but especially in terms of its early years), is the

overwhelming sense of what Downing has called 'social Whiteness': the presumption that the

racial characteristics of Whiteness are unobvious and thus 'belong' unproblematically (at least

in terms of race) to society. Whiteness is, in fact, to be found everywhere and nowhere. It is all

and nothing: all, because it is everywhere to be found and assumed to be the norm; nothing,

because it is presumed to be nowhere in particular, inconspicuous by its presence and not

requiring to be 'marked'. This implicitly assumes the racial (White) homogeneity of the British

television nation, which goes far to explain the racially specific, exclusionary and binary (either

White or not) logic of its modes of address.[4]

Hence, racisms are not always about stereotyping, marking and denouncing, but also about

omitting, excluding and abjecting. Black people are rarely seen as 'highbrow' arts reviewers, as

opera-specialists or even as sports commentators (although African-Caribbean men play such

a central role in athletic *performance*), and this says as much about them, as always being seen

in the boxing-ring or on the dance-floor. Asian men are rarely seen as the muscle-bound hero of

the piece, which says as much about them as always being depicted as victimised shop-

keepers. Visual images of Asian women rarely depict them as assertive, political or ambitious,

which says as much about them as images of their passivity, silence and lack. We can take this

one step further by noting that, given that representations of Black and Asian people have

been increasingly widespread since the 1970s, this says something about the dominant feature

of their representation prior to that: absence. Black people, as I have argued, were generally

not seen as an integral *part of* British social, public or cultural life, but as separate and different

from it. Hence, part of the realisation of this project has been that there is very little material

of substance on which to base my discussion of how Black people were represented on British

television prior to the 1960s, because they were very rarely there.

Like other areas of public and political life such as the press, education, the arts and science, early British television took on the heritage of social Whiteness which essentially 'framed and sustained a racist national self-understanding' (Downing in Newcomb, 1997:1333). Here, it is worth noting the importance of nostalgia in maintaining social Whiteness. Just as nostalgia is often tied to patriarchal definitions of femininity, so it is also often intimately linked to notions of a civilised *status quo* which excludes Blacks. Nostalgia attempts to solicit an irretrievable past and invent what was often never there. Of course, ethnic purism is always about reviving a refined and undiluted condition. Thus the popular notion that Blacks and Asians have only ever existed in Britain since the 'immigration wave' of the 1950s, functions to deny a long-standing Black presence which does not fit into the dominant 'newly-arrived, alien, unassimilated, problem-bearing' rhetoric of post-war delineations of Black-British people. We have seen the extensive role played by nostalgia on television: the summoning of the past as catharsis. But we have also seen how Black people come to the fore in moments of 'crisis' and change, often as its primary signifiers, suggesting that nostalgia is often not about recovery, but about denial. If we are to support Benedict Anderson's oft-cited judgment that all nations are 'imaginary communities', then we need to ask who makes up the imagined nation that British television is addressing and represents? If public service broadcasting is assumed to be in the 'national interest', then what does the televisualisation process reveal about its limits? Is there a distinction between a multiracial society and a multiracial (TV) nation? While television might be a symbol of the nation, can we really say that it is representative of it?

'Social Whiteness', in the context of British television, can roughly be divided into three chronological phases: the first (up to the 1970s), saw television, in its formative years, adopt and develop an inclusionary notion of White nationhood and a largely complacent attitude towards representing Britain's ethnic diversity (thus marking 'Blackness' by its absence); the second relates to the 1970s and 1980s, which saw the emergence of the most forceful counter-strategies such as multiculturalism and anti-racism against the notion of Britain as an undifferentiated, mono-cultural society; and the third, most recent phase, has seen on the one hand, the unsettling of social Whiteness and some important signs of Black diasporic influence on Britain, but on the other, the resurgence of new forms of nationalism which call upon the 'authenticity' of Britain as an 'essentially' White nation.

The first phase saw Black identities dominantly relegated to the margins of British national life, both in terms of how they were represented and in terms of how they were addressed by the enunciators of British television. The difficulties in negotiating the 'pros and cons' which Black people were seen to have brought, resulted in an ambivalent approach to representing Britain's new ethnic communities. Black people were more often 'talked about' than 'talking'; their value as individuals (measured either through diverse characterisation or space for the articulation of their personal politics) was often blocked by a reduction to the 'sociological'. Here we can note the explicit lack of complex and individualised Black characters. Thus, the generalised social type which the Black character 'stood for', particularly in relation to 'White society' (for example, a victim of/a menace to/reacting against/inassimilable to), became the dominant player in the way s/he was represented. Two points should be added here: first, that by 'early', I actually mean up to the middle part of the 1970s when the first set of alternatives to this 'central culture' began to emerge; and secondly, that television was, therefore, a forceful

social engineer in making Whiteness appear neutral, normal, natural and perhaps most importantly 'colourless' (Dyer, 1987). Since racial consciousness and difference was only 'realised' or addressed when Black people were in the frame, this gave the impression that it was only Black and Asian people who 'owned' a racial identity, and that 'race' and 'racism' were on the margins of British society.[5]

The dominance of 'social Whiteness' meant that when Black people did appear, it was usually in terms of a 'social problem', since this was assumed to challenge the homogeneity, 'simplicity' and 'purity' of White people's social existence. Thus, the trope of the Black social problem was, often with the best of liberal intentions, a feature of post-war humanism; a predicament which needed to be reformed or 'solved' in order to make society 'better'. But this rationale was also developed, by some, into a more definite exclusionary logic which said that the only way to improve society, was to get rid of the problem in such a way as to get rid of Black people *per se*. The sense of social Whiteness across different modes of programming meant that White characters and settings were often depicted as 'put upon', agitated or unnerved by an alien, disturbing or forced Black presence. Moreover, these fears were mostly depicted as 'natural' and 'inevitable' for the White characters/person/subject to feel. This was most evident in documentaries and drama, where the narrative framework often positioned the White characters or subjects as the central protagonists having to deal with a new 'foreign' presence, be it a new Black neighbour, or Black son-in-law, or Black employee. Black characters, meanwhile, were often peripheral, not only on a textual level, but also in relation to articulating *their* own experience, views or opinions. Examples here could include **The Negro Next Door** but also the later example of **Jewel In The Crown**, in which 'Blackness' was predominantly filtered through the White characters and programme-makers' perceptions. The

fact that Blackness was often seen to pose a problem, provided the opportunity to invest in

the dramatic devices of conflict, tension and strain. This recurrent racial-coding of conflict

could also be seen in news, comedy and sport.

The second shift in this reign of 'social Whiteness', was the challenge posed to it by those who

felt it excluded the importance of minority contributions to the make-up of British society. A

key intervention in the cultural leadership of social Whiteness came, of course, with the

struggles over access and funding during the 1970s and 1980s: an attempt to access moves

from the third to first person, the object to the subject - to become an accessed voice. But the

process which allowed this shift was not - as we have seen - without its obstacles,

contradictions or indeed, limitations. This was partly because the very structures of 'access'

and 'specialist' slots through which many Black people publicly came to voice, were often

treated as biased, unrepresentative and specific, in relation to more general 'mainstream' public

opinions, and to a more central and supposedly neutral flow of programming. There were, in

addition, new 'burdens of representation' for those now in a position to produce

representations of race. This was most explicitly realised in the 1980s, the heyday of

'multiculturalism' and 'anti-racism', when the critical debates about race, identity and

Britishness centred, in particular, on the area of visual representation. The limitations of access

were recognised through the area of Black programming and multicultural units which, for the

most part, were viewed as *strategic* interventions in patterns of ownership and power, and as

necessary initiatives which provided a critical gate-keeping opportunity. At the same time, the

content of their output was more widely contested. Whilst generally considered important for

the breakthroughs they made, it was also realised that many of these efforts did not ultimately

have the power to dislodge 'official' attitudes towards 'race'. Nevertheless, the intervening

strategies against the dominant regime of representing race, particularly those which emerged

from the work of Black-British independent film-makers, proved - amongst other things - that

meaning is never fixed, that it had become a key site of contestation and that subjects always

have the power to be changed or 'trans-coded'.

While we can identify the effects of this second stage on more recent cultural formations

(particularly in aspects of Black-British film, style and music - see Chapters 1, 6 and 9), the

third stage of 'social Whiteness' has also seen renewed and neo-nationalist claims of

'Britishness' as 'Englishness' or 'Whiteness' (see Chapter 1/ Section 1 and Chapter 7).

Although we can identify this as a 1990s phenomenon and as a defensive response to the

threat of the loss of national identity posed by globalisation, changes in Europe and the supra-

nation state developments, these assertions of singular national identity are as tenacious as

early assimilationist models of integration and as committed to registering the importance of

cultural sameness for the maintenance of social cohesion and unity. One recent issue over

which the splitting between those who 'belong' and those do not has been reinscribed, has

been in the new moral panics around political refugees and asylum seekers to Britain (see

Chapter 1). The xenophobic treatment of and public response to these 'newcomers' (Britain as

a 'soft touch', and recurrent concern about 'bogus' claims and 'welfare scroungers') has

arguably heightened since the 1996 Immigration and Asylum Act.[6] But there are many other

examples which point to this resurgence in social Whiteness and national anxiety, including: the

Right's (and most explicitly Norman Tebbit's) persistent derision of 'multiculturalism'; the

xenophobic attitudes which continue to surface, particularly in the context of sport (for

example, during Euro '96); the absence of appreciation at the 1995 VE Day celebrations of

Black people's contributions to the Second World War; and the more general concern about the

impact of the European Union on the supposed social cohesion and political unity of Great

Britain.

If we turn our attentions to television in particular, we can take the example of the TV60

celebrations on the BBC (Tx:3.11.96) which commemorated the 60th year of British television.

The retrospective acclaimed, almost without exception, the work of White (mostly male) BBC

stars and programmes, with only a cursory and awkwardly-placed acknowledgement of the

work of Lenny Henry - the only Black star it could boast in its sixty year history. Moreover,

drama, documentaries, travel programmes and game shows have, in the 1990s, become

increasingly driven by the cult of the usually White cloned personality. Of course, this reign of

social Whiteness is not just an issue for those Black cultures, vernaculars, styles and interests

that don't get a look in, but for *all* alternatives to what has been defined as central. We can see

new forms of social Whiteness in the 'new laddism' of the 1990s: in Chris Evans' recurrent

lampooning of Black people in his weekly show, **TFI Friday** (Channel 4) (Cedric's Comment

from the Cafe, Asian lookalikes, 'the Plunging Asian Shopkeepers of Britain');[7] in Richard

Littlejohn's populist vitriol against all who are not White, male or heterosexual (Littlejohn

presented ITV's **Thursday Night Live**, appeared as a regular panel-guest on the topical

discussion programme, **The Sundays** (Channel 4, Tx:30.5.98-11.7.98) and has his own

satellite show **Littlejohn: Live and Unleashed** (Sky 1, 1998)); and in Gary Bushell's

constant derision of 'loony leftism' and 'multiculturalism' as a threat to 'good old British

values' (**The Trial of Enoch Powell, Bushell on the Box**). (See interview with Bushell in

Phillips and Phillips, 1998:268-9.) There is a new thirst to speak 'uncut' (Littlejohn's

company is called 'Uncut Productions') and outside 'the new conformism': to produce

anything that is antithetical to 'political correctness' whilst also daring the 'thought-police' to

back-up any evidence of 'racism'. It is striking how this backlash phenomenon has appealed to a certain middle-class populism which still continues to be cultivated by the media. We can add here that, despite the durability of *specific* types of fantasies and stereotypes of Black people on British television, there remains an important *lack of specificity* and cultural authenticity when it comes to the details of 'Blackness'. Thus mosques are confused with temples (BBC, **9 O' Clock News**, Tx:3.96), Black men with dreadlocks are all assumed to be Rastafarians (**Crime Stoppers, LWT**, Tx:15.3.96) and there is, in general, a lack of respect for the specificities of 'other' cultures (for example, religious, language and cultural distinctions).

b) The liberal impulse in broadcasting

The second main point I want to make is in relation to 'liberalism' (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3 in particular for detailed definitions and arguments around liberalism), which I understand as a politics which prioritises the 'freedom of the individual', rather than 'equality in people's condition'. The essentially democratic impulse which social, socialist and liberal theories share (Williams, 1977:150), is what often serves to underplay the fundamental strain between their varying goals. Thus, as I argued in Chapter 2, the liberal tradition (on which British television is founded) has not always worked in seamless harmony with the concept of 'multiculturalism', been an active supporter of social pluralism, or guaranteed the elimination of racist bias in cultural representation.

In fact, I have gone further (see Chapter 3) by arguing that the liberal rationale has, in some senses, often sustained and validated racist viewpoints. For example, it is actually *through* television's self-proclaimed liberalism (via policy, regulation etc.), that: 1) the extreme Right are, to this day, granted prime-time television access; 2) British-Muslims, particularly as a

result of the Rushdie affair but also by way of a number of other popular images of Islam (see

Chapter 3), are represented in such limited ways, precisely because of their supposed lack of

respect for Western freedom and 'tolerance'; and 3) social inquiries into aspects of Black

Britons lives have sometimes been conducted in such a way as to reproduce limited and

stereotypical images of the subject/object of concern. All these instances reveal the

sentimental, nostalgic and parochial uses and effects of liberalism. As Parekh and Bhabha

argue, 'Liberalism has always remained assimilationist: others must become like us, my present

is your future. It has always remained profoundly fundamentalist' (Parekh and Bhabha, 1989).

According to Stuart Hall, the liberal consensus is, 'the linch-pin of...'inferential racism'. It is

what keeps active and organized racism in place' (Hall, 1981:48). And in specific relation to

television, Trevor Phillips argues that: 'cultural safaris into black life are motivated, quite

properly, by liberal instinct. People want to know about us. That's fine, but what they get are

snapshots' (Phillips, 'Black in Britain Special' *The Guardian*, 21.3.95:4).

Television's liberal voice can therefore be understood in different ways. On the one hand, it

can be considered as radical and different from the dominant complacency and social Whiteness

of mainstream television. It says, "we have Black people living in Britain and we need to

consider what impact that is having on British society". This could most obviously be seen in

a lot of the social documentaries and dramas of the 1960s and in the specific concerns of

particular individuals such as John Elliot, Philip Donnellan and John Hopkins. On the other, it

is also part of television's 'official' regime of representing Black and Asian people as marginal,

different and quite often, problematic. This is not to collapse a racialised regime underpinned

by liberalism into one occupied by the radical or racist Right, nor to collapse reformism into

racism, but simply to say that 'liberalism', by definition, is neither defiantly radical nor

actively anti-racist - this is neither its achievement, nor its goal. Liberalism works *through*

notions of impartiality and independence in order to support itself. As I demonstrated in

relation to news in particular, the liberal process posits television as the middle ground

between what *it* defines as 'the extremes'. It is what we could colloquially call 'sitting on the

fence'; never *seeming* to interfere, but always shaping the underlying agenda and defining the

limits of the normal in such a way as to confirm its democratic status. Of course, the fallacy

here is that television is neutral and independent, when we know that it does, in fact, actively

mediate the subject-matter it produces and positions itself in 'the centre' of a spectrum it itself

defines. Equally, the powers of liberal intent do not assure a definite liberal reading - and we

have seen this in some detail in relation to **Fable, The Negro Next Door, Jewel In The**

Crown and **Till Death Us Do Part.**

The liberal effect is multi-dimensional, so that while it usually appears to and indeed can

pertain sympathetically to the interests of 'the public', it can also sustain more discriminatory

and individualistic sensibilities which rest in direct contradiction to this. For example, we saw

in Chapter 2 how, despite the widespread inclusionary notions of solidarity, communality and

welfarism in a lot of post-war social documentary, this did not always depend on - and often

depended on not - including the Black subject. In Chapter 3, we saw in the case of more recent

'investigative' documentaries such as **Underclass in Purdah, Forbidden Love** and **The**

Peacemaker that, as well as producing some very narrow stereotypical images of British-

Asians and actively seeking out a dramatic framework, the 'subjects' of these liberal

expositions were accessed in such a way that they themselves helped to actively produce the

stereotype. It is common then (indeed it is a tool for liberal production), to see Black people

(and in these examples, the mostly British-Muslim subjects) add to, and be implicated in, the

ideological effect of 'Other-ing'. Indeed, the liberal rationale can be (and is increasingly being)

shared by apparently disparate thinkers: racists, anti-racists, conservative assimilationists,

social pluralists, and so on.

c) The ambivalence of racial stereotypes

The third argument which I want to present here, is that while the dominant strategy for

representing Blackness and constructing otherness and exclusion has depended on the use of

stereotypes, this has been a complex and ambivalent exercise. The ambivalence operates on an

extra-textual basis; at the level of the interplay between the producers, readers and the image

itself. Racisms themselves operate in different ways and are not always about presenting an

ethnic group negatively. Thus, the dualist principles of 'negative' and 'positive' which have

fuelled much of the argument around stereotypes, including for a long time, those advanced by

Black people themselves, have severe limitations. It bears repetition here that a distinction can

be made between the uses of and differences between 'social types' and 'stereotypes' (Dyer,

1993:11-18) (see Chapter 1). 'Social typing' is, in a sense, an inevitable and necessary system

in order to produce and interpret meaning. By contrast, stereotypes reduce everything down to

a few simple, essentialised elements and, in so doing, crudely simplify, popularise and indeed,

fix the difference of the original 'type'. Hence, television, as a representational system which

depends on the use of social types, off-the-shelf clichés and conventions and on actively

constructing new/updated stereotypes, plays a central role not only in defining what these

differences are, but in 'fixing' them in their place.

We have seen many examples of this, but most clearly perhaps when we cross-cut them with

other variables such as gender. Central to television stereotyping is the combination of race and

gender, for the representation of both men and women in different ways. So that, for example,

we can compare the main stereotypes of Asian femininity (oppressed, passive, exotic), with

those of African-Caribbean femininity (sexual, aggressive, predatory) and the main stereotypes

of Asian masculinity (patriarchal, timid, assiduous, orthodox), with those of African-Caribbean

masculinity (criminal, violent, feckless, sexual). Here we see that Blackness has been

constructed in limited but persistent ways and often in line with what Jo Spence calls an

'implicit narrative' pattern (Spence, 1980:29-45). Just as we can see distinct codes around

depictions of Black femininity, so Black men are also drawn according to their Otherness (their

hyper-masculinity, for example, is part of that Otherness), so that stereotypes of 'race' remain

dominant in marking the boundary between those who belong, and those who don't. The

recurrence of these 'raced' and indeed 'gendered' motifs can be identified throughout this

study, although they often vary from their modern and traditional forms. The entertainer,

native and slave types which Hall long ago identified as television's basic 'grammar of race'

(Hall, 1981:39) are however, still everywhere to be seen.

But if we look at some of the features of these different stereotypes, we can also note that,

firstly, they do not always depend on the 'negative' and that, secondly, each 'type' can

contain apparently contradictory and opposite qualities. These stereotypes depend on what

Sander Gilman has identified as the process of 'splitting' of the good and bad object of the

stereotype, so that:

> We can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. We can move from loving
>
> to loathing. The most negative stereotype always has an overtly positive
>
> counterweight. As any image is shifted, all stereotypes shift. Thus
>
> stereotypes are inherently protean rather than rigid. (Gilman, 1985:18)

Thus, while the Asian man might often be depicted as the passive victim, he can also be

represented as an active and shrewd businessman; while the Black man is recurrently depicted

as a base criminal, his toughness and aggression is also held up as iconic in sport and music. To

make things even more complicated, each of these good/bad sides can be further split, so that

(as we saw most clearly with sport and light entertainment), a single type can be 'good' and

'bad' at the same time. We can take here Hall's example of Ben Johnson, who, during the 1988

Olympics denoted 'heroism' (record-breaking athlete) and 'villainy' (drug-user) at the same

time (see Hall, 1997:223-279). Or we can think of any one of the examples I referred to in

relation to sport, which demonstrated this split between 'good' and 'bad'; Ian Wright, Imran

Khan, Mike Tyson, Jason Lee (good footballer/bad sense of humour), Tommie Smith and John

Carlos (heroic Black Power icons/viewed as deviant by the US authorities), and, of course,

Linford Christie, the 'hot-headed anti-hero'. (In many of these examples we have also seen

how 'being good' has often been deemed attainable because of the 'hero's biological make-up,

which raises additional questions about how the 'good Black' is actually valued.)

What all these various stereotypes do share, however, is a notion of *difference*. They are

important for the ways in which certain (racist) assumptions are made about their ethnic make-

up. The 'raced' stereotypes have been depicted in a variety of ways, but virtually always as

'Other'. The *timing* of the intensified use and production of the raced stereotype is also

revealing. As Lola Young notes, 'those who embody Otherness and difference are often the

focus for the projection of white society's rages, fears and anxieties' (Young, 1996:183).

Indeed, we have ample evidence that discourses around Otherness and images of difference

have become increasingly intensified in moments of crisis, anxiety or when the concept of .

White nationhood itself appears to be under threat (culturally different 'outsiders' during the

1960s anti-immigration period, British-Muslims during the Rushdie affair, Linford Christie

following his 1992 Olympic Gold success, Black youth during the 1981 Brixton riots

coverage). But they can also serve as the 'focus for the projection of white society's'

fantasies.' The ways in which we have been directed to look, or the 'preferred meanings' of the

texts, most obviously in light entertainment and sport (the 'body genres'), have been based on

the complex processes of envy, desire and fetishism, which point to even more ambivalence in

the ways in which 'Blackness' is 'Other-ed'. As Kovel says in a more general discussion about

White racism, Blacks are depicted as,

> the fantasy of a fantasy - not cold, pure, clean, efficient, industrious, frugal,
>
> rational...but rather warm, dirty, sloppy, feckless, lazy, improvident and
>
> irrational, all those traits that are associated with Blackness, odor and
>
> sensuality. (Kovel, 1988:61)

This works, once again, most explicitly in terms of light entertainment and sport, where Black

people are routinely held up as icons, sex symbols, the carriers of style and modernity. But we

have also seen that these images are often dependent on the commodification of the Black body

and thus on the use of other stereotypes. I looked at this in some detail in Chapter 6 in the

context of popular culture. Here, I spoke about this love of difference, the exotic, 'a bit of the

Other' (Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:467) in relation to popular music forms but as I

concluded there, that desire can still be policed and mediated by the dominant cultural

institutions. I also made reference to 'postmodernism', with its essentially pluralistic objective

to exclude nobody and embrace all kinds of difference. The opening up of new popular visions

of difference through the process of globalisation in the late twentieth century is an important

consideration here. But as Hall reminds us, just because the 'gaze' of difference might be

encouraged through the 'global postmodern' this does not necessarily mean that it is any

different from anything we might have had before (see Hall in Morley and Chen, 1996:465-475).

To what extent then, can we assume that the racist assumptions which underpin the thrill of exotica, fetishism, voyeurism and control are refused entry in postmodern cultural forms? Does postmodernism 'even out' differences or accentuate them and if so, is it in the interests of achieving genuine equality in cultural and political life? There is probably a case to say that it is, in fact, doing both (a few steps forward, a few steps back) which as such, makes it impossible to measure in terms of 'success' or 'failure'. Dyer reminds us that, 'Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West, but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at the differences that surround them' (Dyer, 1997:3-4). The postmodern understanding that we all now exist in a melting pot of different subcultures, overlooks aspects of control, power and domination which facilitate the structures of media industries. It also fails to 'see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule' (Dyer, 1997:4).

So it is, as we can see, difficult to classify the stereotypes which have circulated around Blackness as 'good' or 'bad, 'negative' or 'positive', or the process of stereotyping as something we are subordinate to or outside of. Indeed, we have learnt this most arduously in the failure of attempts to replace 'negative' with 'positive', realising that this does not always guarantee the elimination of negative connotations of the image, or that difference and otherness will simply be 'smoothed out'. While we can agree that British television has renewed old myths of 'Blackness' and actively constructed new ones, it is limiting to believe

that if we swap 'bad/negative' with 'good/positive' or eliminate what can be considered as stereotypes, public and popular images of Black and Asian people will simply 'improve'. This would do little more than show that a cosmetic sense of reality could be produced (Malik, 1998:310). It can even make the Black image seem more shallow and lifeless. We have seen examples of this in relation to film and drama, where writers or directors have been so committed to making their Black characters 'noble' or 'proud' or 'good', that they forgot to make them into characters!

Section 2: Questions of Policy and Practice

In this section, I want to move away from directly addressing questions of on-screen representation, to briefly review some general points I have made about race-specific media policy, regulation and management culture within the institutional context of British television. Although there is arguably some connection between the producers of images and the images produced, I would suggest that essentially, questions of economics and policy (media contexts) and questions of representation (media form and content), have to be viewed as two distinct areas. Indeed, our expectations of each are not always the same. So, for example, while the argument that the number of ethnic personnel working within the media should at least be representative of the wider population carries some weight, the suggestion that television should have to reflect 'the real world' in strict proportionality is less credible, impossible to implement and not necessarily what we should expect from the medium. Policies which relate to off-screen matters such as promotion, training and employment are also supposedly more tangible to implement than more 'subjective ones' related to on-screen imagery. But, as I will go on to argue, paper-driven directives cannot simply be taken at face-value or singularly eliminate other burdens - of representation, audience-response, subject-matter, ratings and

cultural value. Policy can also misfire or be implemented ineffectively and ultimately cannot determine how cultural frameworks are established and maintained. So just as the interests and agendas of (Black and White) programme-makers do not always correspond with those of the viewing public, so the concerns of the power-brokers and the policy-makers do not guarantee appropriate or meaningful intervention in representing cultural diversity.

Media policies are usually a response to economic, political or socio-cultural demands. Thus we have seen throughout this study, that questions of Black representation are, in fact, often the direct result of extra-textual reasons. The inclusion of Black faces and characters, the exploration of 'Black Issues', the training and recruitment of Black programme-makers, and of course, the designation of Black programming and Black 'specialist units', have often resulted from conscious efforts being made to redress the lack of Black imagery and participation in British television. Here, the social and the political contexts inform the text before it has even been produced. From John Birt's initiative to boost the number of Black people involved in the news genre, to Channel 4's minority-friendly mandate, to various Black-targeted recruitment and trainee schemes, to the 1982 Workshop Declaration which supported Black independent production, British broadcasters have indicated that, when they want to act, they can - and this is most clearly displayed in the area of public policy. From 'equal opps' ads to notions of 'best practice', policies are used for both commercial and ideological reasons and define an institution both in terms of its own activity and in its relationship to the wider community. Issues related to policy therefore, play an integral part in the way expressions of Blackness are negotiated, produced and reproduced and in the way environments which either nourish or constrain certain kinds of production are formed. ·

Of course, policy works on many different levels (national, regional, international), and often

unequally between different media and further still, between channels themselves. There has,

for example, never been a uniform policy across all British television channels that ethnic

minorities should be catered for in specific ways. This mission, particularly prior to the 1980s,

was left to a 'common sense' approach and to the traditional principles of universality, public

service, accountability and social responsibility on which the BBC had been founded since the

1920s (see Chapter 1 for more details on the principles behind British broadcasting policy).

But as we have seen, these were intrinsically ambiguous codes, meaning that British television,

although it generally operated within a highly regulated environment (compared to other

mediums such as the press), was essentially subject to it own interpretation of 'public service

broadcasting'. This allowed the various channels to react slowly to register redefinitions of

what constituted 'good professional practice' in relation to the multi-diaspora make-up that is

Britain. There was very little in terms of considered equal opportunity policy. It was assumed

that the social democratic paradigm and the principle of universality through which British

broadcasting functioned, was, as much as possible, in 'the public interest' (see Garnham's

critique of the public service model, 1983:24).

We can generally identify the late 1970s (and more specifically 1979 when the new

Conservative Government took over), as a key juncture in British broadcasting policy: a shift

from traditional notions of public service and social democracy to a more individualistic, free-

market approach - although Channel 4 which was, in fact, a unique and up-dated version of the

public service ideal, was set up at around this time (see Chapters 3 and 9). It was also during

the 1970s and early 1980s, that the series of interventions which I outlined in Chapters 3, 4

and 9 (such as those made by CARM, the CRE and the Black Media Workers Association),

and the individual efforts of various Black radicals and critics such as Darcus Howe, Gus John, John Larose, Stuart Hall, Cecil Gutzmore and A. Sivanandan began to push the question of institutional discrimination onto the agenda of various media organisations. There were, as we have seen, various policy responses to this and the most obvious 'solution' was found with the introduction of Channel 4 in 1982, which, in turn, had varying degrees of impact on both BBC1 and BBC2. Britain began, in a clearer sense, to operate a duopoly model of broadcasting which accommodated public and private broadcasters in a way which roughly worked within the interests of 'the general public'.[8]

In keeping with its traditional (albeit apparently renewed) conception of public service, there were also, by the late 1980s, a number of anti-racist directives and ethnic minority development programmes, and some attempts to boost Black media workers' skills and provide graduate-trainee schemes within the BBC.[9] The BBC acknowledged that, 'few [ethnic minorities] are immigrants and many have known no other home. They are an integral part of British society' (BBC Producers' Guidelines, 1993:94; my additions). The introduction of many of these Black-targeted initiatives - just like the value of some Black programmes and departmental provisions - needs to be recognised for at least acknowledging the inequities in the recruitment of Black media workers as well as representation. Moreover, television, particularly during the 1980s, can be identified as one of the few areas of the media which was seen to register the need for greater equality of opportunity. Some ethnic minority 'development' programmes have continued in the 1990s although, it would seem that in the light of broader shifts in the television industry, their future looks uncertain. The wider context of an increasingly hurried, commercial environment (within a more extensive backdrop where money-friendly versions of neoliberal speak are everywhere to be heard), threatens to make

training, nurturing and equal opportunity initiatives less of a priority for broadcasters (see

Chapter 9).

Moreover, the value of these interventions needs to be carefully assessed: how are the trained-

up members of the schemes valued within broadcasting institutions? What are the realistic

opportunities that they can aim for after the scheme is completed? Are these schemes

effectively implemented or simply brandished about, by those who employ them, like trophies

of progression and liberalism?[10] There is also the deeper matter of the 'culture' and cultural

perspectives of broadcasting institutions in general, and of those who occupy their boardrooms

in particular. Are Black entrants into a large corporation such as the BBC simply incorporated

or (for those who want to) granted access to make significant changes in the area of Black

representation? What is the value of the quantitative approach which is favoured by so many

of today's powerful institutional gatekeepers, who appear to award themselves brownie

points for commissioning research which adopts the 'counting-heads' method (for example,

the industry reports presented at the 1996 'Channels of Diversity' CRE Seminar; See

Appendix D). The qualitative value of these representations, the modes of production,

transmission, reception and address, and the ways in which the images themselves are managed

and by whom, still, I would suggest, remain vital considerations which can tell us more about

the state of representation than crude statistics. Besides, there are still issues about how data is

collected, in whose interest it is designed, and what impact its findings actually have.

Ultimately, monitoring and counting-heads, although a useful indicator of the state of things (if

effectively collated), can be a purely superficial exercise - the question is surely what we

expect that percentage of ethnic minority broadcasting workers to be representative of.

The two 'minority' channels (BBC2 and Channel 4) profess to being alternative outlets to

BBC1 and ITV and indeed, audience figures tend to suggest that they are seen to appeal to

minorities and have a higher 'cultural' profile (see Appendix I). But, as I noted in Chapter 3,

since the mid-1990s, there has been a general demise in the amount of multicultural

programming on British television (European Media Forum, 1996). Any quick glance across

the daily schedules today, shows us that the alternative channels have become increasingly

dependent on US imports and home-grown 'safe options' for their peak-time programming. Of

course, if we are to take the terms of traditional television policy literally, then we would see

that the mere concept of separate minority programmes and Black strands (from **Asian Club**

to **The A-Force**), directly contradicts the utopian remit on which British broadcasting is

founded because it consolidates Black audiences and programmes within particular slots (see

Broadcast Research Unit, 1985:3). The fact that we still have 'Black Christmas' (1995) and

'Indian Summer' (1997) seasons, are indicative of how poorly integrated Black programmes are

in the mainstream schedules across the television year. Furthermore, specific Black-targeted

programmes have, throughout their history, been placed in 'graveyard slots' (Channel 4's

Asian and African films, **Nai Zindagi, The A-Force**), or scheduled against other prime-time

audience pullers (e.g. **Eastenders Vs. Black Britain/East**). And many Black actors have

complained (with considerable evidence), that they have not been given as high a media profile

or promoted to the same extent as their White colleagues (Earl Cameron, Oscar James in *The*

Sun, 15.11.87, Marianne Jean-Baptiste in *The Guardian*, 15.5.97).

Further problems remain. Even those who head today's Multicultural Departments, such as

'Yasmin Anwar, are reluctant (as indeed, were Farrukh Dhondy and Narendhra Morar), to

commit themselves or the channels they work for to the possibilities of 'nurturing talent',

offering training, or even of commissioning smaller, lower-profile companies over those high-profile (mostly White-led) ones, which tend to have a larger capital-base and are quick to 'deliver the goods' (there are of course, some high-profile Black-led independent companies such as Bandung, Crucial Films and Black Audio Film Collective). Whilst the 1980s were eventful for introducing a move towards independent practice which was (as we saw in Chapter 9) critical for the openings it provided for many Black cultural workers - most notably through the Arts, Drama and Independent Film Departments - there are now signs that the independent sector is actually narrowing down to a core set of 'preferred suppliers' (Willis, *The Guardian*, 25.5.98:5). There is some competitive lobbying going on within the independent production sector. So although the expansion of the independent sector might have given rise to a range of influential and commanding Black productions and cultural workers, the drive towards an independent, single project-driven, commissioning structure has also pushed some Black media workers to a point of job-insecurity (particularly those working in non-managerial positions or outside the bigger structures). In addition, there still remains an under-employment of Black people at senior producer, senior director and executive levels. The number of Black senior executives can still (as it could ten years ago) be counted on one hand.[11] In fact, some of the most senior Black figures in British broadcasting (Waheed Ali, Ben Robinson, Samir Shah, Narinder Minhas) now work in the independent sector, signalling a demise in the number of Black executives working directly for the five channels. Black journalists still represent a small minority and, at the time of writing, it is estimated that only 0.01% of National Union of Journalist members are Black (*The Guardian*, 11.5.98:7).

Apart from the important work of the European Broadcasting Union and the law enforcement capacity of the CRE, critiques of the media's representation of 'race' are (within the wider

context of the disengagement of the left) less publicly voiced today. Perhaps this is also partly

because British television *appears* to have registered policies which consider Black audiences

and issues of representation, most obviously with the inscription of specialist units, a handful

of senior Black media executives and Black-targeted programmes. Ultimately, organisations

such as the CRE cannot control output; that is in the hands of the programme-makers

themselves. As the Chairman of the CRE, Herman Ouseley, stated in his address to a number

of influential broadcasters in 1996:

> At the end of the day the CRE cannot do anything: it is down to you, the
>
> people in television that make the decisions...but I am making it quite clear
>
> to you today, and this is a promise, that the CRE will be coming after some
>
> of you. I am told by some of my advisors you cannot formally investigate
>
> television companies and their casting practices. But we *can* investigate the
>
> way in which contracts are given out, we *can* investigate the way in which
>
> deals are being done. (CRE, 1996:31-32)

We need to consider the future of Black-British production, beyond the good intentions of 'by

the year 2000' speak.[12]

Section 3: Local/Global and Black-Britishness

I want to conclude by considering the impact which recent economic and industrial market-

oriented changes have had, or are likely to have on, what we might call the cultural and

sociological state-regulated aspects of the media. What effects will the shift in emphasis from

traditional, state-regulated media policy and the *cultural* impetus of the media, to its

commercial worth and relation to the (global) market have on Black-Britons' standing in the

media public sphere? And, as I asked, in Chapter 9, what chance do Black media practitioners

have of developing a powerful counter-force in a rapidly metamorphosing marketplace? I have

already considered these questions in some detail in relation to 'access' television (Chapter 3)

and independent practice (Chapter 9), where my basic claim was that the cultural, local and

political have, to some extent, given way to whatever else might attract the biggest audiences

and lead to the highest revenues. But I have also noted that 'expansion' itself, as in the case of

the terrestrial television market (and most obviously Channel 4), has generally led to an

increase in the amount of choice and diversity for television audiences (see Chapter 3). But

whilst expansion can mean the opening up of distinct and diverse voices and sensibilities

(think of the recent spate of US and US-style 'people talk-shows'), it by no means guarantees

it. Recent changes such as deregulation, satellite and cable have generally resulted in the

fragmentation of the market. We have seen a decline in British terrestrial production and less

money available for foreign filming, triggering an increase in co-production deals and an

investment in commissioning programme-makers from abroad. There have also been cuts in

operating costs (because of the difficulties in raising additional revenue); a rise in the cost

(particularly sport) and number (particularly fiction) of purchased programmes; and aggressive

global marketing strategies. What effect will these changes have on Black media workers, local

(and in this case Black-British) audiences, and free-to-air programming?[13]

As well as considering the effects of new technologies, concurrent shifts in relation to

demography and 'cross-culturalism' are also likely to have an important impact on Black

representation. As was noted at the 1996 Edinburgh International Television Festival, the year

2011 will see both a vast proliferation of channels and marked demographic shifts where ethnic

minority groups will make up an estimated 10% of the British population (see Smith, 1996).

In larger urban conurbations such as Birmingham and London, ethnic minority groups are set to

make up to a third of the total population. In addition, there are now, more than ever, an increasing number of 'mixed race' and hybridised identities which, as audiences become more and more ethnically and culturally diverse, places new pressures on the medium to move away from its prevailing White Vs. not White logic.

The impact of global shifts and new technologies on producing a new deregulated, multi-media, digital media condition has been an important area for recent debate, raising questions about the state Vs. market, public service Vs. commercialism and community Vs. singularity in the regulation of the television industry. For every one who argues that a global media future will dismantle space and disrupt time, connect nations and its people, and celebrate diversity and difference (McNeill, 1994, Young, 1996 CRE, 1996), there is someone else ready to argue that it will merely bring about an erosion of that which distinguishes the local, global and national (Ross, 1996:172). The main issue, with respect to our concerns, is whether these changes will encourage a homogenising global postmodern towards and within cultural representations and organisations, and a 'downgrading of cultural specificity in themes and settings and a preference for formats and genres which are thought to be more universal' (McQuail, 1994:112).[14] We need to ask whether the new cultural scene is likely to facilitate what Schlesinger terms 'identity by choice' (Schlesinger, 1991), where communal values related to ethnicity or religion are reflected in and forged out of and across diverse TV channel options so that, 'with greater transnational communication, the identities of individuals may be determined more by economic, political and cultural communities, than by nations' (Richards & French, 1996:36-7). In general, there are three main differences of opinion here: first, that 'more' does, in fact, mean 'more of the same' so that choice and visions of diversity, rather than increasing, are actually reducing down to the same stock of images, becoming more similar or more

sensationalist; secondly, that 'more' means more diversity and increased opportunities to cater

for the needs of more assorted, culturally specific and local audiences; and thirdly, that

everyone can now be served in different ways: those who can afford to pay will get access to

extensive tiers and packages of programming (in Pay-TV and pay-per-view for example), and

those who cannot (or who can only afford the BBC's licence-fee), will still get access to basic

media resources such as terrestrial television (Barwise and Gordon in Briggs and Cobley,

1998:192-209).

In the UK, this last scenario is arguably likely to dominate, given the fact that the state

'protected' BBC (with its renewed charter, ongoing licence-fee, and reaffirmed mission as a

public service broadcaster) is still at the core of British broadcasting. Terrestrial television

continues to dominate the British broadcasting environment and still prides itself on acting as a

'public service'. As such, it is important for how it generates and circulates meanings about

nationhood, community and society and for the ways in which it marks, excludes and

addresses aspects of identity and difference within the construction of the imagined

community of the nation. Using a more abstract point of view, what we like watching is not

always *all* that we (should) expect television to offer. Thus, while it is important to register

the changes we have witnessed since the 1980s triggered by the process of deregulation, new

technologies and a decline in state-run and regulated models of public service broadcasting

(Petley and Romano in Dowmunt, 1993:27-49), it is also important to remember that

traditional regulated models of British broadcasting are still the norm for most people in

Britain, with an audience share of approximately 91% of all weekly viewing (Fiddick, *The*

Guardian, 26.6.95:10).[15] We also need to avoid being too purist about what 'public service

broadcasting' actually is, since there is ample evidence to suggest that this itself has all too

often been commercially-motivated.

Nevertheless, cable and satellite, without claims of 'responsibility', 'quality', 'intervention' and 'public service', are (ironically) providing many Black-Britons with programmes that they want to watch and, indeed, are willing to pay for. Since the early 1990s, Black-British audiences have, in general, favoured the global TV models established by extra-terrestrial television. Cable and satellite television (a classic example of global mass culture at work), has had a profound effect on the viewing practices of Black audiences and has provided employment for many Black media workers.[16] The increasing popularity of satellite, cable and pay-TV systems amongst some of Britain's Black communities (particularly first generation) has undoubtedly been as a result of their foreign, theme-based and local programming provisions. At the time of writing, approximately 20% of London homes, for example, have cable or satellite, and 50-60% of these are in the homes of ethnic minorities. A noteworthy 73% of Asians who receive cable or satellite tuned into the Asian channel Zee TV,[17] and over a half of ethnic minority communities say they are willing to pay for targeted channels.[18] Consequently, many franchised regions are currently being faced with the alarming reality that ethnic minorities are watching over 20% less of their channels (namely LWT, Carlton and Central who between them cater for 70% of the total ethnic minority audience in the UK), and are at the leading edge of the commercial threat posed by alternative viewing options. As Colin Stanbridge, Managing Director of Carlton Broadcast observes, "In the not too distant future it is projected that 25% of the Carlton region will be from ethnic minorities. We literally cannot afford for them not to be watching our programmes' (Stanbridge in Smith, 1996:32). Trevor Phillips reminds us that, in essence, "this is not a problem for the blacks. It's a problem for our industry" (Phillips in Smith, 1996:31). Alongside this, is the realisation that there is, in

fact, an ethnic minority 'niche' market to be found in the gap between what terrestrial television

is currently providing for Black people and what they are tuning in to elsewhere.[19] For many

people, the gap between terrestrial television's principle of universality of appeal and the

actuality of output is evident, as is its inability to resolve - in consistent ways - what it sees as

the acute incongruities between universality of citizenship and the differences of ethnic and

other identities. There is also the issue of the regional distribution of Black media workers and

on-screen Black representation.[20] How 'representative' will programming be in those regions

where more Black people live? How will terrestrial broadcasters determine what will attract

Black audiences, and what can we realistically expect of regional television serving those

localities with low ethnic minority populations? In this context, it bears repetition that the

cultural value of ethnically diverse representations are as - if not more - important than their

numerical standing, and that the cultural significance of Black representations are not exclusive

to Black audiences.

Like much cultural change, these new shifts in the marketplace, are full of pros and cons.

Whilst the new commercial reality might, in fact, trigger the broadening of terrestrial

television's address to Black viewers, the logic that the 'liberalization' of the market will

inevitably open the airwaves to more diverse and significant (in terms of numbers and cultural

value) types of programmes for Black-British audiences, also needs questioning. We need to

consider: 1) the fact that different Black markets exist in different regions across the country

(are we to expect a continued indifference or at most patchy response from all the ITV

regions?); 2) the possibility that what we *think* Black audiences want to watch and what they

actually choose to tune in to, might be two very different things; 3) the strong evidence that

the open market (as has been proved in some cable and satellite channels (Sony Entertainment

Television Asia, UK Living, Live TV)), often means identical products, poor quality, and an investment in cloned genres, formats and personalities; and 4) that images of nuanced, local and indigenous differences might be overrun by universalised and homogenised global ones. Whilst one of our key concerns might be that different ethnicities are included in contemporary modes of public communication, we also need to pay some attention to the types of images which new distinct programme packages are likely to produce and make accessible. Of course, as things become increasingly market-oriented, this does not mean that images are becoming more depoliticised or occurring in a social vacuum. The role of dedicated and purposeful regulatory bodies here, are vital in order to ensure that certain guidelines are kept in place.

It makes sense to avoid taking a purely technocratic view, and assuming that technology will determine all and therefore, we must either simply accept or resist it. The technologically deterministic view overlooks who owns, uses and has admission to the means of production and tends to cite technology itself as the issue, rather than the way in which it is distributed and used. Technology is a means and not an end: something which we can use for our purposes if we have ownership and access. As Imruh Bakari argues:

> Black people have never been afraid of technology. Black people don't
> worship technology, they use it, they misuse it, they abuse it for their own
> purposes...the problem is with ownership and access. New technology is
> only detrimental if you don't own it or can't use it. (Bakari, interview with
> Malik, 12.10.96)

The primary issue needs to be one of how Black image-makers, rather than waiting to be given voice by the big players in the global media process, can find unique ways of providing it for themselves - be it on a local or global basis. The way in which various groups will be touched

by international media flows, new technologies and global transportation will affect their relation to the time-space dialectic in distinct ways (Richards & French, 1996:34). The way Black audiences will be located in relation to time and space, which Hall suggests are the 'basic co-ordinates of all systems of representation' (Hall, 1992:301-2), will therefore be the defining factor for the future of Black access and representation. The simultaneous processes of globalisation and localisation will 'create new and unpredictable forms of connection, identification and cultural affinity, but also dislocation and disjuncture between people, places and culture' (Gillespie, 1995:7). There can, as such, be no universal agreement about whether emerging transnational flows will encourage a recognition of cultural, national and linguistic difference or try and smooth it out into more of the same. Ultimately, the future of television is predominantly in the hands of those who occupy positions of ownership and regulation: its position remains tangible for those who dare to imagine and exploit alternatives. A rethinking of what global mass culture can and does mean is essential if we all want to be active and important players in its process. Celebrating the relations between the local and the global, the marginal and the dominant as equally important and powerful is, as such, essential so that we can bring about our own slant on what McLuhan has called a 'global village' (McLuhan and Powers, 1989).

If the overall tone of this conclusion sounds pessimistic at worst, or sceptical at best, then it is not meant to, for my overriding argument is that television has the power to change and 'work' in a number of different ways, and that the best evidence of this is in its past. We can see that changes in the contours of Black representations have not been all 'bad' or all 'good', and that images of 'Blackness' have not functioned or been produced in simple or singular ways. We cannot afford to assume that racism is endemic within and across all British institutions. This

assumption, which in fact, works against the ideals of liberalism and individualism, urges us to

be complacent about television's ability to *not* be racist and its capacity to produce ideologies

of civic equality.[21] Television has its own responsibilities and indeed, powers, to generate

important, radical and influential notions of 'race', identity and difference for us all.

NOTES

[1] We can identify this changing nature of culture, meaning, and identity if we look, for example, at the way in which political language works, so that, 'coloured' became 'immigrant' became 'ethnic minority' became 'Black', and that today, even the term 'Black' is being contested by many and has generally been replaced by the more ethnically specific 'Asian' and 'African-Caribbean'. Of course, these changes have taken place within representation and culture.

[2] See Bennett (1986) for a critique of structuralism and culturalism and the usefulness of Antonio Gramsci and his concept of 'hegemony' in studies of popular culture. Also see Hall's 'Cultural Studies: two paradigms' and 'Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity' in Morley & Chen,1996, 411-440.

[3] See Hoare and Nowell-Smith, Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Prison Notebooks, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, 326 for important arguments about how 'common-sense' produces 'the folklore of the future'.

[4] In this last sense, Yasmin Anwar's professed enthusiasm to focus on what she calls 'cross-culturalism' will hopefully be an exciting and significant area of intervention in breaking down the traditional White/Black dichotomy.

[5] It is interesting that the 'act' of racism has usually been presented in explicit terms such as racial violence, the views of the extreme Right, etc., as if this is all that 'racism' is. Institutional and inferential racism has very rarely been addressed.

[6] The Labour government has admitted that its asylum policy is in a shambles, *The Guardian*, 12.5.98.

[7] On one edition of **TFI Friday** (C4, Tx:4.4.98), Evans, following a recent trip to India, announced that the Department of Employment had refused to allow an Indian-based cabaret band come to Britain to perform on his show. In order to encourage empathy from the audience, he said, "These guys have never been out of India. They do not have a good life".

[8] Regulatory bodies such as the Independent Television Commission (ITC) (previously the Independent Television Authority (ITA)) have a responsibility to monitor this, although the nature of regulation has altered over time and most obviously since 1992 (see Negrine in Briggs and Cobley, 1998, 224-249).

[9] Recent initiatives have included the BBC Television Training Trust (established in 1990 under Section 37 of the Race Relations Act), designed to offer those from ethnic minorities, 'a chance to gain television production skills and pursue a career in programme-making' (BBC Publicity notes)· This has since become the Television Production Trainee Scheme with the RJT scheme as the radio equivalent. Although it accepts general applications, it reserves five (half) the places for Black candidates. There has also been a Technical Operations Bursary Scheme.See Chapter 9 on other initiatives such as Synchro (launched in 1992 by the Arts Council and Carlton TV), the Black Arts Video Scheme (initiated in the late-1980s), Black Screen (launched by the BBC in 1993) and Screenwrite.

[10] Resting on the fact that positive discrimination is illegal, many have also argued that the reservation of numerous places for Black candidates merely panders to the whims of 'political-correctness'. For example, in June 1994 Conservative MPs criticised the BBC for reserving 6 out of 13 places on the Regional News Trainee Scheme for those from ethnic minorities (*The Guardian* 'BBC defends stand on jobs for minorities', 13.6.94).

[11] Samir Shah (Head of BBC News and Current Affairs), Trevor Phillips (Head of Current Affairs at LWT until 1994, now Executive Producer/Factual Programmes/LWT), Dele Oniya (Head of BBC African - Caribbean Unit), Yasmin Anwar (C4, Head of Multicultural Programming)

[12] A survey of ethnic minorities in broadcasting revealed that in 1989, only 0.9% of the BBC and commercial sector workforce were Black. The BBC has stated that by the year 2000, it wants 8% of its

work-force to come from ethnic communities (see Appendix M). This initiative has been monitored by the Internal Directorate Implementation Group (DIG) and has since bettered its aimed target, but there is still the question of what level Black people are employed at within the institution (see Salam in Frachon & Vargaftig, 1995, 68-75.

[13] For a summary of the different definitions of globalisation and the principles of global culture, see Peter Golding (1994). Also see Featherstone, 1990, McGrew, Lewis et al (1992), Dowmunt (1993) for general discussions and Hall, Gillespie and Ross for more specific discussions in relation to ethnicity.

[14] The connection between the West and the 'developing' world is important here (see Chapter 4 where I touch on the global inequality in the production and circulation of news and information). The belief that Western media could activate development in other parts of the world was expounded by David Lerner & Wilbur Schramm (1958), (1963), (1967). A commission, chaired by Sean McBride, was set up in 1976 by UNESCO to analyse the balance of world communications.

[15] The BBC has a 98% reach across Britain The BBC's Director of Policy, Patricia Hodge, estimates that the BBC will hold a 40% share in the near future (a drop from 41.4% in 1998). Channel 5 has a 3.4% audience share and cable/satellite channels a 12.7% share.

[16] For example, independent film-maker Ruhul Amin has had his work commissioned by the Discovery Channel. Some ZeeTV programmes were British-produced.

[17] Zee TV was previously known as TV Asia. In early 1998, Zee TV was replaced on cable stations by Sony Entertainment Television Asia, although there are other Asian cable channels such as Ice-TV, Namaste and Asianet. There have been a number of complaints about the new Sony channel, because much of its schedule is made up of dubbed British and American shows from the 1970s and 1980s. In response to these complaints, Sony now assures it will phase out the dubbed programmes (see Appendix L).

[18] All figures here are taken from Smith, 1996. Also see ITC, 1996.

[19] This of course, does not always come in the form of specifically targeted Black programmes, but in those programmes which Black audiences tend to find appealing - which is also proving difficult to determine for channel controllers. It is interesting to note current trends in the US in terms of what American-Blacks are tuning in to. In the post-Cosby era (1992-), Black and White US audiences over the age of 21 are becoming increasingly polarised in their viewing tastes,whilst young White Americans are increasingly crossing over to watch all-Black shows such as those screened on UPN (see Appendix J).

[20] Although the two companies serving the London region (Carlton and LWT) have 5.5.% and 6% respectively of workers coming from ethnic minorities, the overall ethnic minority percentage is 20%. It is currently estimated that two out of three Black people live in London or the West Midlands. By the year 2003, Channel 4 (under new ITC guidelines announced in 1998), will be required to commission 30% of its programmes from outside London.

[21] The view that television has its limitations in producing alternative meanings has been taken on by some cultural theorists. John Fiske for example, suggests that everything is determined by 'the freedom of the viewer to make socially pertinent meanings and pleasures out of television' (Fiske in Seiter et al.,1991, 60).

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