

# Geographies of Belonging: white women and black history<sup>1</sup>

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*This article discusses the need for, and possibilities of, writing integrated and multicultural histories of Britain by focusing on the relationships formed between white and black women in the workplace but primarily through their families. The article presents examples from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries which illustrate possibilities for examining integrated histories in urban and rural locations utilising ongoing research undertaken by community-based scholars. The article draws upon Hazel Carby's 1982 essay on the 'Boundaries of Sisterhood' to make connections between critics of the making of women's history in the 1980s and the continuing need for black histories to be integrated into British history.*

## Introduction

Reflecting on the development of feminist theory at the end of the 1970s, Hazel Carby observed that the deconstruction of the family was critical in the analysis of women's oppression and she acknowledged that it would be hard to argue that the structures of the household were not oppressive to women. However, like bell hooks, Carby questioned whether this framework could be equally applied to 'the black family'. As the West Indian Front Room project reminded us, the black family home was often a site of cultural and political resistance to state and popular forms of racism during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Historically, as today, these

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families included white women. What is the place of these women in 'black history'? How are their relationships with race and racism told within British women's history? Their stories are complex and varied. They are stories that in some cases they gave birth to, nurtured and maintained under difficult circumstances. By exploring the 'geographies of belonging' experienced and made by some of these women, in this article I seek to examine how their biographies and 'their social and political relationships, practices and identities that together can be described as a sense of belonging' contributed to the making of 'black history' in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

As Lister *et al.* establish, a sense of belonging is not a fixed state 'nor just a material one; it involves also emotional and psychological dimensions' operational in many different places and geographical scales.<sup>4</sup> In this article I suggest ways in which we may gain insights into women's 'geographies of belonging' to 'mixed communities' produced through their places within micro geographies of the home, family networks, geographies of travel and migration. These histories are not to be idealised for they also include geographies of conflict and the changing states of 'belonging' experienced by white women as their 'mixed race' families and their desire to be part of them came under attack from the public and the state in early-twentieth-century Britain. These interventions were at times violent and dramatic, challenging white women's sense of and ability to belong to 'mixed' communities and the nation.

My own research focuses upon the historical geographies of black women in Victorian London. I aim to recover the lives of black women and their families through the records of marginalised women in asylums and children's homes as well as by trying to interrogate the lives of working women. This article returns to some of these women but the focus here is the white women in their worlds, white women who were their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, friends and work colleagues. Reviewing 'black histories' through the geographies of belonging experienced by white women opens them up as stories not of 'black' or 'white' history, but examinations of multicultural life in Victorian London. This article focuses upon places and experiences of integration in England. It does not seek to romanticise spaces of integration but by reading with and against the grains of archives seeks to explore how we might analyse the myriad of experiences geographies of integration created.<sup>5</sup> By providing examples of how integrated histories might be recovered from eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century archives, I intend to suggest ways that feminist researchers can find a place within their current research for spaces of integration and to illustrate why these moments are important for broader understandings of women's history:

WANTED, An Attractive Young Lady as PIANISTE and vocalist, at the Corn Exchange Hotel Market-place, Boston, to commence on the 5th July; also a Coloured Barmaid, Permanent Engagement, if suitable.  
Address, with terms, Charles Thorpe Clarence Hotel, Boston.  
(*The Era*, 20 June 1880)

WANTED, a Coloured BARMAID, to be trusted to take charge of the house. One who can speak English preferred.—Apply to Mr Henry Bullimore, Royal Oak,

Brungwick-street, Whittington Moor, Chesterfield.  
(*Liverpool Mercury*, 7 April 1881)

WANTED, Coloured Lady, for Bar; Previous experience not necessary. Professional preferred. For particulars apply, Mrs Wilson, General Post Office, Stockton.  
(*The Era*, 19 September 1885)

WANTED, the Coloured Barmaid who was recently at the Queen's Head Hotel, Mansfield, to COMMUNICATE with Mr George Brown, Lion Hotel, Lady's-bridge, Wicker, Sheffield.  
(*Liverpool Mercury*, 26 June 1885)

Found in digital archives of nineteenth-century newspapers, the above advertisements for barmaids are an example of how the archive can make visible black historical geographies in Britain. They also give us some insight into the racialised roles black women were sometimes asked or expected to fulfil in their work. Reading against the grain of the archive, we can use the advertisements to begin to ask questions about the relationships between black and white women at work. What did it mean for white women that some bars sought to employ specifically 'coloured women'? Presumably white women were unable to apply for these jobs. Did they see black women as excluding them from potential employment? Did they resent these women of colour and how did women deal with these situations of competition in which they found themselves? Did they accept it as part of the exploitation of women at a local or national scale, or did they challenge it? If they did challenge it, did they do so for women, or for white women, or for women of colour? Are these moments of racial exploitation by employers an indication of the kind of divisions that contributed to the racialisation of the unions in twentieth-century Britain (as referenced by the *Negro Worker* in 1932—see below)? These questions are important for an integrated analysis of women's history. Although I will return to these questions, this article does not provide answers to them. While they remain unanswerable, there is value in posing such questions because they enable us to identify moments of possible conflict and solidarity between women more clearly.

### **The Present Moment**

A debate on the politics of solidarity—political, cultural and financial—was hurriedly revived in response to riots that occurred in English cities during the summer of 2011.<sup>6</sup> The British historian David Starkey gave a now notorious analysis of the riots on the BBC's current affairs programme, *Newsnight*. Asked by the programme's chair at the start of a panel discussion if the rioting represented a profound cultural shift in Britain, Starkey argued that, only time could tell of their significance. However, he did believe that the riots did show that a profound cultural change had already taken place:

The whites have become black, a particular sort of violent, destructive, nihilistic, gangster culture has become the fashion and black and white, boy and girl operate in this language together, this language which is wholly false, which

is a Jamaican patois that's been intruded in England, and that's why so many of us have this sense of literally a foreign country.<sup>7</sup>

David Starkey evoked Enoch Powell's 1968 'rivers of blood' speech to contextualise his observation that 'a substantial section of the "chavs" ... have become black'.<sup>8</sup> However, Starkey's argument that a new or substantially different degree of intermixing between 'black' and 'white' communities is corroding the 'true' and 'real' nation has a far longer history in Britain.<sup>9</sup> A number of commentators have criticised Starkey's simplistic account of racial mixing and summer violence.<sup>10</sup> Some have also sought to contextualise the riots within riots or uprisings of the 1980s,<sup>11</sup> but they have yet to place the Government's or David Starkey's response within a longer historical context of racism and the demonising of black bodies and their white friends/lovers/mothers during times of national crisis or change. As discussed below, similar racist proclamations about relationships between white women and black men headlined British newspapers in 1917 as part of an increase in racial tensions in Britain that would erupt in violence across the country in 1919.

It seems unlikely that the current Coalition Government's Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, will concede that events such as the 1919 riots or histories of multiculturalism and racism are key events and processes in the lives of British women or the making of the nation. In January 2011 Gove (a Conservative MP, who describes himself as 'a journalist by profession, a politician by accident and a historian in my dreams',<sup>12</sup>) announced a review of the national curriculum taught in English schools.<sup>13</sup> In history and geography Gove has demanded a return to a curriculum of core facts and knowledge.<sup>14</sup> For Gove, 'the study of history is important. Not just because it is an excitement in itself—because it brings us into direct contact with the lives of those great men and women who bent events to their will'.<sup>15</sup> As Richard Evans and many others have observed, Gove and his lead advisor for history, Professor Simon Schama, wish to use the history curriculum to foster a patriotic sense of British national identity in school pupils.<sup>16</sup> The dangers of patriotic history lessons have been discussed in the context of countries where they have been utilised by fascist, racist and liberationist governments.<sup>17</sup> Their difficulties come from the profound divisions of opinion over what constitutes, or should constitute, a nation's identity.<sup>18</sup>

As Evans re-emphasises, British national identity is constantly being remade and did not exist before an Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707. So this very English proposal of British history (although Gove was brought up in Aberdeen) is beset with many national problems from the outset. Still, Evans echoes conservative commentators when he claims that acknowledging diverse perspectives on history means that it 'makes far more sense to teach British children of South Asian or Afro-Caribbean background about the parts of the world where their families originated—the history of the Mughal Empire, or of Benin or Oyo, for example—than to teach them about Alfred and the cakes or Drake and the Armada'.<sup>19</sup> Not only is Evans's statement deeply patronising to young people of all ethnicities, but he can only make such a declaration if he assumes that 'people of colour' have no historical roots in the 'multi-layered' histories of

Britain before the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* in 1948. Even the handful of barmaids referred to earlier challenge his assumption because of the questions they raise about their own lives and the communities in which they lived in Lincolnshire, Stockton, Chesterfield and Mansfield.

There is an important role to be played by feminist historians in the contextualisation and illumination of these current debates. Germaine Greer recently reminded us that the politics of the women's liberation movement was about the processes of freedom and the liberation of women from a society constrained by gender inequality. It was not just about creating equality with men so women could fight on the front line of wars or change the 'frocks worn on the front bench' of Parliament.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the aim of feminist historical research is not simply to change the names found in history books but to continually challenge the processes of historical research. In Britain this is a time when understandings of our racialised past are sorely needed. Examining this past demands a new emphasis on integrated multicultural histories of Britain and the everyday political and cultural lives of women.

### Looking Back

When Hazel Carby demanded that White Women Listen! in her seminal 1982 essay on 'Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', she asked a number of questions about the composition of feminist 'herstories' in Britain.<sup>21</sup> The research being undertaken by feminist authors was critically examining the role and lives of women, but the experiences of black women were largely ignored in this remaking. As Carby stated, black women's history was not just about dealing with absences, but about deconstructing the way black women were portrayed in the stories that were already told about them. It seemed that while uncovering and interrogating the histories of women, feminist historians were not unpicking the interconnections between women and racism as well as their experiences of class and gender. The battles which black women had fought in the streets, in schools and courts of 1970s Britain were absent in feminist theory, as were their historical experiences. Consequently, books about women's history were really books about white women's history.

For Carby, very few historians were thinking critically about the way in which white women were invested in racist, imperialist institutions.<sup>22</sup> The histories of black women and white women were deeply intertwined, but this did not mean that they were the same story. Sheila Rowbotham had noted the tension between imperialism and women's oppression in 1972, acknowledging that:

the colonisers' women have themselves enjoyed the spoils of imperial domination. Sometimes they have been its most vehement and cruel defenders. Because their own superiority was insecure they have turned on the native women with a bitterness in which sexual and racial jealousy combine.<sup>23</sup>

The experiences of cotton, tea or sugar plantation mistresses were clearly vastly different to those of their female employees, but the racialised hierarchies of these imperial geographies were given little attention.

Furthermore, there were few acknowledgements of the racist investments held by many early feminist heroines such as the birth control pioneer Marie Stopes.<sup>24</sup> As Jane Carey has recently argued, although links between eugenics and birth control movements have gained some attention, feminist historians have tended to try to dissociate women like Stopes from eugenics rather than acknowledge that ideas of birth control were fundamentally linked to discussions of race.<sup>25</sup> On reflection, Carey asks how it is possible that the early birth control movement has ever been written about as anything other than a movement for racial population management. The failure to fully address the embedding of race thinking in feminist discourse means there have been few debates about how racism (including the marginalisation of white women who fought racism as an integral part of their understandings of inequality) influenced the theoretical perspectives and aspirations of the so-called 'second wave' of feminism.<sup>26</sup>

Carby argued that when focusing upon black women's history it was important that their experiences were not grafted onto imperial histories as an exotic distraction. Since then Catherine Hall's illustration of the intimacy between political and cultural spaces in colony and metropole has shown how theoretically important Carby's assertion was.<sup>27</sup> For Carby, the book that broke through the barrier between gender and race was *Beyond the Pale* by Vron Ware, which began to write the history of women in British colonialism and the role women in the colonies played in the abolitionist movement.<sup>28</sup> As Clare Midgley has shown with her work on anti-slavery campaigns, women's ideas of their white supremacy did not need to be shaken by their commitment to abolition campaigns. Further research within this vein of 'new imperial history' by Antoinette Burton, Ann Laura Stoler and Dipesh Chakrabarty (to name just three of those represented in the *New Imperial Histories Reader*)<sup>29</sup> illustrates that in critical colonial histories women of colour are an integral part of understanding global histories. Black women are not and cannot be an exotic add-on to research, even if they may have been viewed as such by some while they lived and remain such to those who wish to maintain a celebration of Empire.<sup>30</sup>

### White Women and the 'Black Family'

Histories of empire encompass histories of Britain and within that, histories of England. There remains a need to place a postcolonial lens over the research practices of English history to ensure that black women's histories are not awkwardly grafted onto English history. Black women are an integral part of English history and part of their stories is formed through the experiences they shared with white women, women who were their friends, family, landlords, work colleagues and neighbours. A close examination of a single family gives us some indication of how we might imagine remapping these relationships, kinships and networks. This story focuses on the Jefferson family and begins with a third-generation black child, Fanny Jefferson, admitted to the care of Barnardo's children's homes in 1889.<sup>31</sup> At Barnardo's it was noted that the 'little coloured girl' had an interesting ancestry. Fanny's paternal grandfather was thought to have been an

escaped slave who became well known in the East End as a street preacher who had settled in London and married a white woman.<sup>32</sup> Fanny's story was drawn out of the archives because she was 'black', a character who made visible the black histories of London. Initially I did not closely examine the place of white women in Fanny's life, though they were an important part of it. Both her grandmothers and her mother were white. Her paternal grandmother lived close by and was an active part of her family's life. Fanny remains an interesting individual example of black women's history in Victorian London, but refocusing on her entire family history, this 'black history' can be opened up as an examination of multicultural family life in Victorian London.

Fanny's paternal grandmother Fanny Burrige was born in Bath around 1823. By 1846 she had moved to London and married Maddison Jefferson in St Mary, Whitechapel. It seems likely that Jefferson grew up in the southern United States. Born in 1814, he was most probably born enslaved, although there is no evidence as to how he may have left or escaped from that bondage. How and when he travelled to Britain and came to be settled in the capital is also unknown. He may possibly have been a well-known preacher in the East End as the Barnardo's archive attests but on his marriage certificate he declared himself to be a starch worker. Jefferson and Fanny had at least seven children: Maddison, Emily, William, Louisa, Frederick, Louis and Emma. The 1851 census shows that the family were then living at 32 High Street in Bromley-by-Bow, and that Maddison senior still worked in the starch industry as a packer. By the 1861 census the family had moved to nearby Grace Street. In the years before the 1871 census the family had moved at least once again and were now living at 22 Eagleton Road (very close to their former home on Grace Street). Then Maddison still toiled away as a starch packer but he died on 18 December 1871. Following his death,

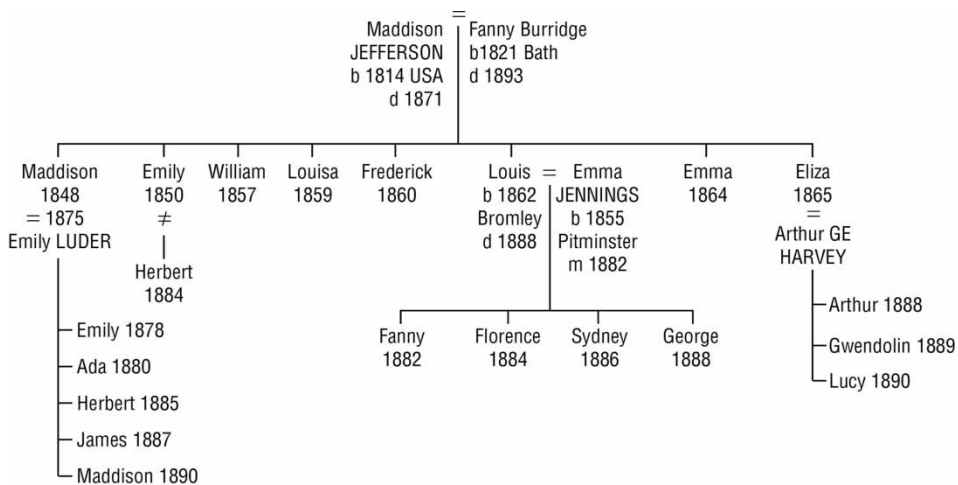


Figure 1. Jefferson family tree.

Fanny continued to live with her family at Eagleton Road. She took in washing to support the family and herself as her children left home.

Fanny Jefferson's mother Emma Jennings was also from the South-west. She was born in, or near, Taunton, Somerset in 1855. As a child she lived with her parents, Maria and Thomas (a tailor who employed two men), and six siblings in Pitminster, four miles south-west of Taunton. By 1882 she too had taken the migration road to London, for this was the year she married Louis Jefferson (Maddison and Fanny's sixth child) in Poplar. Emma already had two illegitimate children. With Louis she had four more children: Fanny, who was born in Limehouse in November 1882, Florence (b. 1884), Sydney (b. 1886 although he died in 1889) and George (b. 1887). At the time of Fanny's birth Louis had followed his older brother into the blacksmith trade, but the family's life unravelled when Louis died as the result of an accident at work in April 1888. His funeral expenses were defrayed by a collection and his co-workers presented Emma with a sewing machine worth £12, but the loss of Louis left the family in severe financial difficulties. Emma received some compensation from Louis' employers, but after a few months these funds ended and Emma found herself in serious trouble.<sup>33</sup> Her two eldest children and Sydney were placed in Poplar Union Workhouse, while Fanny, Florence and their youngest brother lived with their mother in Grace Street.<sup>34</sup> In November 1888 Fanny was the first to be sent to Forest Gate District School, where she was joined by her sister Florence in January 1889.<sup>35</sup> They were not at the school long before Emma withdrew them, convinced the school was ruining their health. This was not a spurious claim. London pauper schools had a reputation for disease, cruelty and overcrowding and Forest Gate School epitomised some of the worst faults of the system.<sup>36</sup>

Emma struggled to keep her family together with the help of her kinship networks. The older two children were taken in by Emma's family and the younger children lived alternatively with their mother and grandma Fanny who, now aged seventy, still worked as a laundress. Emma was employed by her sister Sarah Jennings, a dressmaker in Bromley who had taken in Emma's illegitimate daughter Ethel. A year later, still struggling to make ends meet, Emma applied for her two younger daughters to be cared for by Barnardo's and it was in the archival records surrounding her application in August 1889 that I first came across the Jefferson family. Barnardo's initially took only Fanny, but Emma continued to struggle and the following year Florence was also admitted to the home. With two of her daughters in Barnardo's Emma continued to live and work in London and presumably was able to care for the rest of her family. In the 1891 census Emma is recorded working as an assistant nurse in the South Western Hospital in Brixton. Her mother-in-law was still living at 22 Eagleton Road with Emma (her youngest daughter), her son Frederick and two of her grandsons, Herbert and George—Emma and Louis' youngest son.

Emma's brother-in-law Maddison lived close by on Livingstone Road, off Stratford High Street. Maddison lived with his wife Emily whom he had married in Stepney in 1875. They had at least five children, all of whom were born in Ilford. Grandma Jefferson died in 1893, but members of the family continued



to live close to their mothers' former home. Her grandson, another Maddison Jefferson, was also married in Stepney in 1916. He and his wife continued the family tradition by naming their first child Maddison, although he died aged one. In 1901 there is a further reference to Fanny Jefferson—Fanny and Louis' eldest daughter. Now eighteen, she was working for a clerk, Henry Copeland, as a general domestic servant in Wimbledon. There is one more possible sighting: on 20 August 1910 a Fanny Jefferson left Southampton for New York on the *St Louis*—part of the weekly transatlantic express service provided by the American Line.

This is a snapshot of a large, extended East End family, a 'mixed' family with white and black family members helping each other when needs be. We know it was a family that maintained family traditions and they might well have maintained close ties with each other. Yet such examples of integrated families and their traditions are ignored in the histories of the 'East End' which, as Georgie Wemyss has illustrated, are continually retold as histories of unchanging, homogeneous and purely white working-class traditions.<sup>37</sup> Such histories can only be maintained by ignoring the multicultural families (including on occasion, as Wemyss observes, Jewish families) who have lived in the East End and contributed to the formation of the East End over many generations. Such family histories of integration are not unique to London or to the making of Victorian England. They are intertwined with the cultural formations of Britain through family relations, the development of communities and demands for equality and justice. They can be found in stories of poverty, illness and crime and in the many stories of everyday life that will never be recovered.

Similar stories can also be found in the rural histories of England. Working with the Gretton Local History Society, the community-based Northamptonshire Black History Association has recovered the story of the Dare family.<sup>38</sup> The Dares provide a similar example to the Jeffersons, but in eighteenth-century Gretton, a village situated on the northern border of Northamptonshire. Here, Richard Dare, 'a black man', married Ann Medwell in 1749. Together they had twelve children between 1751 and 1769. Some of their surviving children also married locally, including Robert, who married Elizabeth White on 13 July 1784. Together they seem to have had eight children, seven of whom were baptised and appear in Gretton Parish records between 1784 and 1797. As with the Jeffersons, here is an extended 'mixed' family who can be traced across generations. Unlike the Jeffersons they did not live in a thriving metropolis. How did their experiences of rural life differ to that of urban dwellers at the time? Did their relative isolation protect them from prejudice or increase their visibility? Or were their neighbours simply unconcerned?

Following the end of the American War of Independence in 1783, less than forty years after Richard and Ann Dare were married, London's black population was swollen by the arrival of formerly enslaved Africans who had been promised their freedom if they fought for the British. As the British withdrew at least 14,000 black men were evacuated with them—some escaped to Canada, but many hundreds arrived in London.<sup>39</sup> Abandoned on the capital's streets, their impoverishment, along with stricken Lascars and East Indians, attracted public

attention. In 1786 a Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor had been established to help Lascars and other poverty-stricken individuals of colour. But, by May that year, rather than securing the welfare of the black poor in London, the Committee had been persuaded that removing these people (who numbered nearly a thousand by September 1786) from the capital and sending them to the African colony of Sierra Leone was the sensible long-term solution. Many of the black poor had no desire to be resettled in Africa but were influenced by financial manipulation by the Committee, which refused to continue to support those who refused to agree to the scheme. Simultaneously the Lord Mayor gave instructions for black people found begging on the streets to be rounded up.<sup>40</sup>

Passenger lists held at the UK National Archives for the *Vernon* and the *Atlantic* list some of the men and women who eventually embarked on the pioneering journey to Sierra Leone in February 1787—although this is almost a third fewer than those who initially boarded the fleet of ships in November 1786. The list of those on board the *Atlantic* for Friday 16 February 1787 includes 38 ‘White Women married to Black Men’ (in total 40 white women are listed along with 15 black women out of a total passenger list of 219 including 14 children). There were fewer white women on the *Vernon* but Sarah Whycuff (whose husband had died, possibly on the ship—50 people died before the voyages began), Sarah Cambridge, Mary Sabb, Mary Tomlinson, Elizabeth Lemmon, Ann Thompson and Elizabeth Andrews were all recorded as ‘White Women married to Black Men’ (out of 110 passengers which included 10 black women).<sup>41</sup> The passenger lists reveal the integrated lives that existed among the very poorest and marginalised in London as well as reminding us of the long migration histories of women, black and white, in the costly establishment of British colonies. These men and women faced hardships and disaster in Africa. Many died from illness, their small settlement was destroyed and some were sold into slavery. After four years only 60 of the 374 who had arrived still remained.<sup>42</sup>

### White Women and their Families after 1914

Such stories of integration need to be told and placed into broader historical geographies, but as the difficulties faced by the migrants to Sierra Leone illustrate, these are not all romantic geographies. As suggested by the questions raised by the advertisements for barmaids above, spaces of integration are not always ones of conviviality.<sup>43</sup> By the end of the First World War, racial prejudice in Britain had become more entrenched and more violent in its expression. Black men and women who had immigrated to Britain to contribute to the war effort had initially been welcomed, if begrudgingly. The *Empire News* argued that ‘we need black labour now, we need it badly. We want every hand we can get, every ounce of muscle, every effort, and we cannot afford to quibble about the colour of the skin’. But although black workers might be acceptable, black husbands or neighbours were not. The war had created a ‘black invasion’ and ‘forced the colour problem into prominence. Where we formerly saw one black in a large

city we now see hundreds; where we formerly saw one woman married to a black, or living with him, we now see score. Such marriages should not be allowed'.<sup>44</sup>

'Mixed-race' couples found themselves under increased attack in the British press and in their daily lives. Their attackers blamed both black men and white women for the violence and prejudice they faced. In 1917 the *Stratford Express* declared that it was as a 'consequence of the infatuation of white girls for the Black men in the district' that 'some of the inhabitants are greatly incensed against Blacks.'<sup>45</sup> Under these circumstances women had to fight more aggressively for their family life. In 1917 a couple renting a property in Canning Town in London's East End was threatened with eviction. They took the landlord to court, and in her evidence to the magistrate the woman's mother stated she believed that it was because her daughter was married to a black man that they were being threatened with the loss of their home. The magistrate ruled that the family had a right to stay.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, two years later men and women found themselves attacked in their homes and on the streets during race riots that exploded in Britain. Nineteen nineteen was a violent year across the world with strikes and uprisings occurring across the Empire, Europe and North America. In Britain race riots first erupted in Glasgow in January. By August South Shields, Salford, Hull, London, Liverpool, Newport, Cardiff and Barry would also play host to a new geography of racial violence. As a result of the riots black people (African, south Asian, Chinese, Caribbean and Arab) were attacked throughout the country. Five people were killed, many were injured and over 200 arrested.<sup>47</sup> Reflecting on the period in 1932, the *Negro Worker* assessed that the 'pogroms' had mostly been organised by ship owners and trade union reformists.<sup>48</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson observes that severe post-war competition for jobs and local housing shortages were also major triggers for the unrest—although local press in London were keen to blame resentment of sexual relationships between white women and black and Arab men. This racism was also seen in cases of violence in Salford and Newport.<sup>49</sup>

In her extensive research on the riots in Britain, Jenkinson has identified fourteen black and white women among the rioters and those affected by the riots. They included white women who were employed by or lived with African and Arab men and found themselves and their homes attacked during the riots. Throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s assaults on the families of 'mixed' families continued. State intervention was cemented by the 1925 Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, which demanded that undocumented black seamen had to register as Aliens. Created by the Home Office in the knowledge that few black seamen would be able to prove their nationality, it meant that many black British subjects, including those who had settled and had families in Britain, were threatened with deportation.<sup>50</sup> Initially aimed at 'Arab' seamen, the Order was expanded to include all men of colour. As part of her examination of what Laura Tabili named a 'notorious instance of ongoing state involvement in racial subordination', Rozina Visram relays a letter written to the India Office by Mrs Mary Fazel in September 1925.<sup>51</sup> Her husband, Fazel Mohamed, a Peshawar-born British Indian fireman, had disembarked in Cardiff and been registered by

the local authorities as an Alien for they had ignored his status as a British subject and his Certificate of Nationality. She wrote:

I have been married to him for seven years, and we have three children, therefore the knowledge that my husband is not a recognised British subject causes me much consternation as should anything happen to him in a foreign port his rights as a Britisher would be jeopardised, and consequently my own and our children's.<sup>52</sup>

Her husband's rights were jeopardised. The following year he was arrested just because he was carrying an alien's book, and once again Mary had to write to the authorities on his and her family's behalf. As Visram notes, now with four children, increasing racial hostility must have made life for the family very grim indeed.<sup>53</sup> In 1930 Muriel Fletcher, a researcher trained at the School of Social Science, University of Liverpool released her report on an *Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and other ports*. Filled with racist and racialised assumptions, as Mark Christian observes, Fletcher's report can be seen as marking the official moment in defining Liverpool's 'half caste' children as a problem and blight to the 'British way of life' in Liverpool and other cities.<sup>54</sup> Fletcher concluded that in Liverpool white women who consorted with 'coloured men' fell into four main categories: women who needed a husband to care for an illegitimate child, those who were 'mentally weak', prostitutes, and 'younger women who make contacts in the spirit of adventure and are unable to break away'.<sup>55</sup> White women who claimed their 'coloured' partners to be good husbands Fletcher dismissed as women making excuses for their mistakes, for they 'almost invariably regret their alliance with a coloured man when they see they have chosen a life which is repugnant'.<sup>56</sup>

As Tabili observes, the xenophobic climate of the twentieth century, which intensified during World War One, legitimated the state harassment of an ever-widening array of migrants.<sup>57</sup> In spite of the hostile atmosphere developing around them, women continued to develop relationships with their neighbours. In post-World War One South Shields, Tabili has recovered a number of women who played small but essential roles in the cultural interconnections of their town. They include Margaret, a housemaid who wrote letters for her employer and future brother-in-law Nassar Abdula, and Lauretta, who in 1929 took care of her husband's unemployment wages which Nagi Mohamed passed to her as soon as he collected his regular payment of 28 shillings.<sup>58</sup> These personal histories are illustrative of the essential roles women played as wives, lovers, acquaintances and landladies. As Tabili notes, this latter group of women might have become wives or mothers-in-law, but they were also friends, advisors and confidantes. All these women were far more than 'sexualised bodies': they played vital roles as 'cultural and practical interlocutors and negotiators' for themselves and their families.<sup>59</sup>

Based on her detailed research of migration into Victorian South Shields (including 'white' migrants from, for example, Germany and Sweden as well as Jewish migrants), Laura Tabili argues that a high level of residential and marital

integration existed. Her analysis suggests that migrants were more widespread and integrated relationships of all kinds were more common in England than previously thought.<sup>60</sup> Although more difficult to recover from the archives, I would argue that the Sierra Leone Pioneers', the Dares' and the Jeffersons' family history illustrate the same possibility for black migrants.<sup>61</sup> Feminist historical work is ideally placed to examine our assertions. Feminist methodologies take seriously the everyday dynamics of the family for women, men and children and the importance of friendships and networks in the structural formations of social, political and cultural life. Rethinking how to access the historical geographies of women's lives is important. Considering the lives of women as geographical biographies should be an opportunity to integrate them into histories of migration at a variety of scales—in the home, on the street, in the rural village, in the port city, within the imperial network—and illuminate the pathways that led to settlement and the geographies of interaction people experienced in those places. The spaces where such contacts took place require examinations of the structures of social and workplace relations—be they in factories, pubs, hospitals, restaurants, theatres or residential spaces, or farms, orchards and mills. Such micro geographies should enable us to develop better understandings of local cultural practices. In turn these may be compared to geographies of belonging in other kinds of places, whether similar urban settings or rural villages, as well as international migration trails and the changing national and global contexts of which they were all a part.

### **Looking Forward**

There is a need for diverse political and social histories to be brought together and for them to become integrated within broader theoretical debates. How is this to be done? In her 1982 essay, Carby cautioned that her call did not advocate that teams of white feminists should descend upon 'Brixton, Southall, Bristol or Liverpool to take black women as objects of study in modes of resistance'.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, researchers should not assume that historical work has to be undertaken entirely from scratch. Work on the black presence in Britain is under way. Historians need to consider how this material can be used in the theoretical and empirical work they are currently undertaking. However, this is not to say that there is not plenty of further research and analysis to be done. As Tabili observes, women's role in the histories of migration has received scant attention and much of the material that does exist focuses on travel to and the formation of the United States of America. Expanding the geographies of our research requires an empirical shift in focus for a historiography in which 'surprisingly little has been written' about migration and the sites of interconnection that were created through its processes.<sup>63</sup> In addition, in Britain we now undertake academic research in a restrictive atmosphere of serious financial constraint and within the context of a government that is dismissive of, even hostile towards, the broad church of historical research, particularly critical histories. These are difficult times during which to call for an increasing amount of research to be undertaken.

Cultivating more interactive partnerships with community scholars and research groups may be one way for academic historians of Britain and in Britain to enliven our research and deepen our connections with our local communities. Considering the future of archival sources in the context of the current cuts, Anne Summers has argued that it is up to academic researchers to take an interest in the libraries and archives held by our universities and in our neighbourhoods.<sup>64</sup> She notes that drawing up interdisciplinary panels of support has resulted in the greater use of special collections in institutions where such panels exist. Ensuring that such panels are in operation in our own universities and that representatives from community-based research associations are also members of such panels could increase their access to archival material, as well as opening up new dialogues between academic and community-based research.<sup>65</sup>

It is worth remembering that two key authors in the field of 'black history' in Britain were not academics. Peter Fryer, author of the groundbreaking *Staying Power: the history of black people in Britain*, was a journalist, and Rozina Visram a teacher.<sup>66</sup> Their publications are exceptional in their historical ambition, their empirical originality and their geographical scope. However, recent research that has built upon their foundations is often ignored. In many instances community scholars and community groups, like the Northamptonshire Black History Association, who are interested in their local historical geography, are undertaking this work.<sup>67</sup> They continue a tradition of politicised groups striving to understand their own histories through their own research and interpretations. The nature of their interests and the structure of their financial support mean that usually their work is focused on local histories. Still, through their efforts an increasing although piecemeal geography of material is becoming available over a considerable time period. What responsibility do academic researchers have for the use and dissemination of this research?

Utilising the material that has already been gathered, academic scholars may begin to ask deeper questions about relationships between women, between women and men, between women and their families and between women and their personal geographies of home, region, nation, diaspora, empire and beyond. How did the experiences of 'White Women married to Black Men' differ from the experiences of other white women migrants within Britain or across the Empire? Was life for Fanny and Emma Jefferson more difficult because they married black men or was the racial or 'colour prejudice' of twentieth-century Britain substantially different (and worse) compared to that in Victorian Britain? If so, why, and what are the consequences of that for our understandings of a twenty-first Britain where 'multiculturalism' is being declared not an everyday reality of life but the passing fashion for a late-twentieth-century liberal folly?

Such questions are not a declaration that racial prejudice in Victorian Britain did not exist. Racial prejudice directed at Irish and Jewish populations did occur. Although 'colour prejudice' might not have taken the form of such systematic attacks on communities as it did in 1919, as the advertisements for barmaids

suggest, the racialisation of black women was in operation. How this racism operated and how the family acted as a site of resistance to racism in Britain needs to be subject to an integrated analysis of the lives of working women. The necessity for such historical cohesion in theoretical and empirical histories does not only exist between these women and their white sisters. The political splits in the meanings of blackness and 'black history' that have occurred in the subject since Carby's 1982 essay necessitates a need to remember to envelope the experiences of Asian women into these arguments about British histories as well.<sup>68</sup> If these historical undertakings are not brought together there is a danger that we will slip into different research streams and not meet again until it is too late to determine our course.

## Notes

- [1] I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust, the Women's History Network (UK) and Dr Kathleen Chater, who undertook some of the genealogical research on the Jefferson family. I would also like to thank Rozina Visram, the two anonymous reviewers, Lucy Bland and Katharina Rowold for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this article.
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- [4] Lister *et al.*, *Gendering Citizenship*, 2007, p9
- [5] Following Ann Laura Stoler (2009) *Along the Archival Grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
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- [7] The discussion took place on *Newsnight*, BBC 2, Friday 12 August 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14601813>. Transcription my own.
- [8] On Powell see Jenny Bourne (2008) *The Beatification of Enoch Powell*, *Race and Class*, 49(4), pp. 82–95.
- [9] 'Chavs' is a derogatory term used in Britain for the white working class. The normalisation of the word is the subject of a book by Owen Jones. Both Jones and the writer Dreda Say Mitchell challenged Starkey as part of the *Newsnight* panel. Owen Jones (2011) *Chavs: the demonisation of the working class* (London: Verso).
- [10] The conservative commentator Toby Young came to Starkey's defence in his blog for the *Daily Telegraph*, 13 August 2011. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tobyyoung/100100845/was-david-starkey-being-racist-on-newsnight-last-night/>. In 2011 Toby

- Young, a supporter of David Starkey, was one of a group of parents who opened a 'Free School' in west London (Free Schools are private schools funded by the taxpayer introduced by Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove). The West London Free School made headlines soon after opening when a young black boy was 'suspended' for wearing a 'haircut that's 3mm too short'. London *Evening Standard*, 21 October 2011. <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-24000870-free-school-suspends-boy-11-over-haircut-thats-3mm-too-short.do>
- [11] John Solomos (2011) Race, Rumours and Riots: past, present and future, *Sociological Research Online*, 16(4), p. 20. <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/4/20.html,10.5153/sro.2547>.
  - [12] Michael Gove (2011) Michael Gove speaks to the Royal Society on maths and science, 29 June 2011, speech available from Department for Education. <http://education.gov.uk/inthenews/speeches/a00191728>
  - [13] The Review is specifically about teaching in state comprehensive schools in England.
  - [14] Interview with Michael Gove on the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme, 20 January 2011. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9367000/9367626.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9367000/9367626.stm)
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  - [19] Ibid.
  - [20] Germaine Greer (2011) BBC Radio 3 Free Thinking Festival. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b016vq4v/Free\\_Thinking\\_Festival\\_2011\\_Germaine\\_Greer/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b016vq4v/Free_Thinking_Festival_2011_Germaine_Greer/)
  - [21] Carby, 'White Woman Listen!'
  - [22] Jeffrey J. Williams (2008) Reconstructing Culture, An Interview with Hazel Carby, *The Minnesota Review*, Spring/Summer. [http://www.theminnesotareview.org/journal/ns70/interview\\_carby.shtm](http://www.theminnesotareview.org/journal/ns70/interview_carby.shtm)
  - [23] Sheila Rowbotham (1972) *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 201.
  - [24] Valarie Amos & Pratibha Parmar (1984) Challenging Imperial Feminism, *Feminist Review*, 17, pp. 3–19.
  - [25] Jane Carey (2012) The Racial Imperatives of Sex: birth control and eugenics in Britain, the United States and Australia in the Interwar Years, *Women's History Review*, 21(5), pp. 733–752.
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- [30] For a discussion of the marginalisation of feminist contributions to histories of empire see Barbara Ramusack & Antoinette Burton (1994) *Feminism, Imperialism and Race: a dialogue between India and Britain*, *Women's History Review*, 3(4), pp. 469–481.
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- [38] Details of their research is available online at: <http://www.northants-black-history.org.uk/activitiesResearch.asp>
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- [40] Fryer, *Staying Power*.
- [41] A copy and transcript of the passenger lists are available online from the National Archives: [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/work\\_community/poor.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/work_community/poor.htm) and [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/work\\_community/transcripts/atlantic\\_passengers.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/work_community/transcripts/atlantic_passengers.htm)
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- [43] On conviviality see Paul Gilroy (2005) *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press).
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- [45] *Stratford Express* (Borough of East Ham & West Ham & Stratford), 7 July 1917.
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- [49] For a broader discussion of 'mixed' relationships after 1918 see Lucy Bland (2005) *White Women and Men of Colour: miscegenation fears in Britain after the Great War*, *Gender and History*, 17(1), pp. 29–61.
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- [51] Laura Tabili (1994) *We Ask for British Justice: workers and racial difference in late imperial Britain* (New York: Cornell University Press), p. 114.
- [52] Quoted in Rozina Visram (2002), *Asians in Britain: 400 years of history* (London: Pluto Press), p. 210.
- [53] Another notorious incident occurred in Liverpool in 1945 when hundreds of Chinese seamen married to women in Liverpool were forced out of the UK without their families' knowledge; see [www.halfandhalf.org.uk](http://www.halfandhalf.org.uk)

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- [60] Tabili, *Global Migrants*.
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