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**RACE AND SPACE: MAPPING THE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL IDENTITY**

**DANIELLE LUSTGARTEN**

**A THESIS**

**IN**

**THE DEPARTMENT**

**OF**

**POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS at  
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
MONTREAL, QUÉBEC, Canada**

**APRIL 2001**

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## ABSTRACT

### Race and Space: Mapping the Construction of Political Identity

Danielle Lustgarten

Identity construction is subject to pre-existing meaning systems and values attached to these meaning systems. Race, like class and gender is imbued with meaning which has been given to it through historical circumstance and event, global and local relations, and national policy and ideology. The impact of these forces gives meaning to the discourses which contribute to identity construction. These discourses, in recent critical analysis, have borrowed metaphors of geography, space in particular, in order to gain insight into the particularities of identity construction, how this identity is politicized and the tools necessary to subvert the essential categories of these politicized identities. This study argues that space, as a metaphorical tool, is indispensable in understanding the way in which political identity is constructed, particularly in relation to race and the way in which race is politicized.

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## Introduction

The focus of this paper centres on exploring the construction of political identity, in particular the politicization of Black British identity, through the prism of 'space' –physical (geographical) as well as metaphorical, as it is infused with power. Two relevant questions which can be posed in this context are how is identity spatially constructed and how is space politicized? Geographical and metaphorical space represent a political terrain or territory where identities are constructed and reconstructed, negotiated and renegotiated. Implied in this statement is the simultaneous fixity and fluidity which is present in metaphorical space whereas geographical space generally maintains itself with variations that take place only over time in an effectively more concrete set of circumstances. However, the notion that boundaries or borders of nations and even localities or neighbourhoods in towns can change over time demonstrates that geographies themselves are fluid and not fixed. Both embedded socio-political relations and local cultures constantly influence identity, which is constructed and reconstructed as a result of this fixity and fluidity. The varying politics and social relations make the specificities of space dependent upon them and these local particularities take place in a global as much as in a local or a national context. This means that metaphorical spaces are fluid, always in a state of flux as the meanings attached to those spaces are changing as they are dependent on changing social relations. Consequently, the identity of the subjects who occupy those spaces that are located within a particular set of power relations that are in play, shifts and reformulates itself. It would be important to note that there is an opposing school which endorses the theory that identity is not constructed, but uncovered or revealed. In other words they

believe that identity is not constructed or reconstructed but that there is an essential identity that is revealed over time. While it is perhaps debatable whether or not there is a fundamental aspect to identity this issue will not be addressed here. We will be working on the assumption that identity, at least in part, is constituted.

Another relevant question that arises is how is it that one space becomes dominant over another in a given situation? Is the posturing of these metaphorical spaces dependent on the politics of location? Is location of the subject or the group, community, race, gender, or nation pivotal in understanding how the posturing of spaces is negotiated? There is a process or perhaps several processes underlying the posturing of spaces and identities which contribute to an explanation of why we are working within a given space. This is a complex process that is not unilinear and engages the complexities of social relations to create the narratives that permeate spaces and the identities that are constructed through these spaces. By exploring the historical and ideological influences on political relations in local spaces the impact of location becomes pivotal in understanding the construction of political identity and the construction of a politicized racial identity. In the first chapter we will explore the discourses of space and location in order to understand their impact on identity construction and how space can be used as a tool to understand the relationship between social relations and identity construction. In the second chapter we will examine the politicization of Black identity in Britain and the role and impact of policy, the criminalization and marginalization of Blacks in British society and the limits of citizenship and rights discourse with reference to British Black experience. In the third chapter we will explore how Blacks



perceive their own space in Britain, that is how they experience their Blackness as it imposed from the outside and as they live that identity. The analysis of political identity construction through the prism of the spatial metaphor is useful in understanding the relevance of race and class, how they are politicized and how they are used in assigning meaning and making dominant discourses relevant.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction to a spatially mapped political identity**

Social and political theory is increasingly becoming the site of spatialized discourse. The language employed in critical social analysis is increasingly steeped with spatial metaphors and the implication and analysis of material or geographical space. The implications for a social life which is understood through spatial logic works to inform our understanding of identity. The new meanings spatial metaphors impart have a powerful effect on identity construction. This chapter will argue that the metaphors and geography of space and place inform the construction of political identity. Not only is space an important factor in the construction of political identity but it also informs our understanding of the politicization of such categories as race, class and gender. These spaces are effectively imbued with meaning that is contingent on social relations.

Metaphor works to familiarise the unfamiliar by creating new meanings, reworking language to open up the understanding of a previously narrowly defined terrain. By opening up this metaphorical terrain we are opening up spaces from which to speak. Political identities are now being redefined through these new spaces, both metaphorical and geographical spaces.

The concept of space itself has interesting origins when it was first studied by Newton and Leibniz. While Newtonians conceptualized space from a more physical perspective, Leibniz suggested that 'space was an idea rather than a thing: that space sprang from the mind when thought conceived a *relationship* (my italics) between perceived objects, and had no more real and independent existence than the distance between two persons described as near or distant relations. In this case, space was entirely relative: and if the objects

were removed, space disappeared'.<sup>1</sup> Leibniz gives us a convincing argument from which to launch a discussion on the role of space in the construction of political identity and the impact social relations have on this relative process. In contemporary theory Edward Soja suggests that 'while such adjectives as 'social', 'political', 'economic' and even 'historical' generally suggest, unless otherwise specified, a link to human action and motivation, the term 'spatial' typically evokes the image of something physical and external to the social context and to social action, a part of the 'environment', a context for society – its container – rather than a structure created by society'.<sup>2</sup> The notion that space can be examined as a virtual abstraction is dismissed. The sociologists Manuel Castells and Henri Lefebvre reiterate this point by stating that: 'If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident in the landscape. Space has been shaped and moulded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies'.<sup>3</sup> What we can also draw from this is that space can be understood in terms of how it is a function of society and also that space is used socially as a reference point for location. Location, as a spatial concept, is a product of embedded social and political relations. Location itself is also a concept infused with meaning that needs to be explored, particularly the way in which location and space informs

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Kirby, The Politics of Location (London: Methuen and Co.Ltd., 1982), p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.6.

one another and how largely they impact upon identity construction.

It is argued that identity is largely the circumstance of biography. But what is the underlying face of biography; what are the components, the factors, the multi-layered history that evokes biography into being, writes it and rewrites it over time? Similarly while identity politics is frequently the site of emphasis for conflicting political projects it is also described as a politics which recognizes political activity as always in the process of constructing the self, and this project takes place in relation to others. In contrast, opponents of this intrinsically personal political language argue that this erases collective, emancipatory political projects. However, we oversimplify identity politics by insisting on this binary. In fact, the construction of political identity is linked to the notion of location. Identity is, therefore, more complex than a simple binary as identity can be associated with multiple locations and multiple collectivities in its particularity. Identity is constructed in a context, a position: positioned within the group or groups, located against the other. Identity is relational; identity construction does not take place in a vacuum but takes place in relation to others, how they are defined and how we define them. This set of social relations is the context, the multiple set of locations, in which identity construction takes place. Location, a politically marked spatial identification, is, in recent analysis, becoming routinely used in political discourse. Not only does location work to inform a spatially conceptualised identity but also the conception of these spaces themselves needs to be explored to understand the impact of a spatially infused identity politics.

Iris Marion Young identifies a politics of justice based on the recognition of the group but this levels identity into a one-dimensional concept.<sup>4</sup> It does not take into consideration the spatial identity which locates subjects in varying positions all at once. A spatialized identity which recognizes the subject occupying many position endorses the authenticity of relational subject location. A subject can speak from one or various positions at any given time. Clearly, space and place are integral to the constitution of social discourse in locating and positioning social relations as they relate to subjective strategic location in the struggle for an identity politics. Therefore, the notion of a liberal recognition of what we could call multiple social identities (those which occupy the private and public realms) or what could be perhaps equated with the concept of multiculturalism (limiting ethnic or cultural identity to an officially designated framework developed by public policy) is necessarily limiting. Although there is no denying the historical importance of the enlightenment actualization of the subject and individual or liberal identity, the realities of a postmodern, postcolonial 'turn' demand new vocabularies to treat contemporary social relations and to deconstruct influential political power structures and ineffective notions of justice in identity politics. While Charles Taylor and other liberal theorists attempt to introduce inclusion into liberalism by recognizing the publicness of private identity in such public collective identities they still restrict identity to a unified subject without regard for the contingencies of a politics of location. The possibilities for a recognition of multiple sites of identity for any given subject at any given time are necessarily limited and also ignore

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<sup>4</sup> Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990)

the impact of the power relations associated with these sites.<sup>5</sup> The notion of a unified identity seems rather mythic given the multiple spatial perspectives of political identity and the turning upside down of essential categories such as race. Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenburg help to open up an understanding of the notion that postcolonial migration has given way to cultural hybridity and new identities that recognize the contingency of location in social space.<sup>6</sup> These identities articulate a new syncretism and a powerful new set of social relations based on multiple sites of identification. In order to grasp the full impact of a spatialized politics of location, it is necessary to explore the concept of a spatially contingent identity construction.

How is identity spatially constructed? Spatial metaphors in areas such as social and literary criticism have become a means to understanding social life. Sociology has long taught us that the points which constitute the subject, i.e. body, self, person, subjectivity, identity, have no meaning outside their relationship with a system of social relations. The self, then, only has meaning related to such concepts as feminine or race as these concepts are socially and historically defined. The dominant system of meanings or power fills up these concepts and the systems which exist outside of the dominant meaning system, such as globalization, capitalism, etc. as these concepts are fixed; or they are assumed to be fixed.<sup>7</sup> Theoretical spaces are being mapped, charted, explored, colonized, decolonized and located in social theory. Conceptions of space and place inform identity construction as they work to inform subject location and

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, The Malaise of Modernity (Concord: Anansi, 1991)

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Frankenburg and Lata Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality' and The Politics of Location," Cultural Studies, May 1993, p. 292-310.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, eds., Mapping the Subject, Geographies of Cultural Transformation (London: Routledge, 1995), p.3.

identify the significance of location in social relations. Social relations are increasingly marked by a spatialized discourse which is also evident in the narrative form and its search for a position from which to speak. Space and place can be used both as metaphors for identity itself and also the idea of a kind of topology of identity. The symbolic power of space and place effect not only collective identities but also provides a sometimes contradictory grounding for various political stances. The arbitrariness of boundaries and the overlap between local diasporic identities as well as class and race relations make the specificities of space and place in social relations problematic while providing a voice and metaphorical location from which to speak.

In addressing the question of metaphor and space there are many complex meanings and ideas which need to be explored. First let us look at how we can define space and how this is tied into identity construction. Smith and Katz have illustrated the metaphoric appropriation of space by referring to three concepts; 1)location, position and locality, 2)mapping and 3)colonization/decolonization.<sup>8</sup> They state that location specifies a particular point in space necessarily independent of relation to any other point. Position assumes a location in relation to other locations and their relationships and locality assume a place with a myriad of social and cultural relationships which take place within that locality. The notion of subject position and social location take on a reified meaning within these metaphorical spaces. They impart a social concreteness to chaotic social relations. They give social subjects a place to stand or a place to be and, therefore, subjective location becomes a place where identities are formed by virtue of their location vis-à-vis other social

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds., Place and The Politics of Identity (London: Routledge, 1993) P.69.

actors. Mapping, on the other hand, refers to an active process. This process functions as representing space where space is a given. Mapping is a cartographic metaphor and as Smith and Katz state, cartographic metaphors are very current and useful in social theory. Mapping a certain space can be done in various ways; there is no set structure. Mapping involves exploration and translation of data and lived processes. It assumes a range of representational powers as mapping can be linked to social control as it follows a set of conventions which, in turn, can be subverted through the appropriation of mapping techniques, personal mapping, and the transformation or critique of mapping conventions through a reordering of social space. This suggests that the process of mapping is linked not only to mapping historical, political and social relations which work to inform identity construction but also about transforming mapping to be used as a tool for reconstructing social space and renegotiating identity and its meanings. Finally the concepts of colonization/decolonization are used frequently in social discourse. These metaphors are used to depict social and political domination as it occurs in the everyday practices of social groups. Historically colonization has involved the 'conquest, inhabitation, possession and control' of a given territory and the people who inhabit this territory. This is always done by an external power and is based on the physical and symbolic appropriation of space and the power plays this involves. Decolonization would then be understood as the reversal of this process including the process of reappropriation of political, economic and psychological power by the colonized. Metaphors of colonization have allowed us to refer to this in terms of the invasion and occupation of the social and psychic space of oppressed groups and decolonization refers to the



deprogramming of the damaged psyche and the dislodging of a dominant ideology. In so doing one is able to create a space of one's own and reinscribe that space as such.<sup>9</sup>

Space, in social and cultural theory , gives us greater insight into social reality. Space comes to symbolize something or many things both particular and abstract, an attachment, an identification, a certain meaning which transforms that space into a place with which the subject can identify. Similarly, the reification of meanings attached to a place may be ones given to it by subjects who are positioned differently vis-à-vis the space. In other words, the imposition of meaning may come from subjects or institutions who are located outside this space, physical or metaphorical, and therefore redefine the meaning of the space. What this suggests is that spaces are fluid and not fixed. The meanings attached to both geographical and psychic spaces are fluid. A counter appropriation of symbolic meanings for those subjects who identify with this space could signify a shift in the political and social dynamic. This might indicate that power in social relations shifts according to the meanings that are associated with belonging to a place, location or position vis-à-vis that place. Clearly, space and place are integral to the constitution of social discourse in locating and positioning, hence appropriating deeper understanding of social relations. Geographical and metaphorical spaces are so tightly woven that the borders between these spaces become blurred in the formation of an identity politics. The whole notion of a postcolonial identity refers to both the psyche of the colonized nation and its inhabitants as well as the arbitrariness of fixed

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<sup>9</sup> Neil Smith and Cindi Katz, "Grounding Metaphor. Towards a Spatialized Politics", in Keith and Pile, eds., Place and the Politics of Identity (London: Routledge, 1993) p.27.

categories of identity in a world where spaces and identities are fluid depending precisely on location and how these locations are negotiated.

Stuart Hall's postcolonial thesis shifts concern from fixed categories such as nation or national origin to subject position and 'a politics of location takes precedence over politics informed by fixed categories'.<sup>10</sup> While subject position is invariably the focus and contributes to a deconstruction of power relations, how fixed are the categories of national origin and how do these contribute to a politics of location? Well, Hall's politics of location works to inform the notion of space and place as it subverts the fixity of all categories. Hall extends the fluidity of the concepts of space and place by furthering the metaphor concept and stating that the metaphor itself is not fixed. The notion of fixity in these social spaces atrophies them. He states that the idea of a world with separate identities with self-sufficient cultures and economies has been obliged to yield to various paradigms of connection and discontinuity of relationships that are static and not fixed. The postcolonial has then become a kind of buzz word for a metaphoric understanding of colonization/decolonization. As a politicized conceptual space, the postcolonial becomes a place from which to celebrate difference and redefine the self. This new posturing of the postcolonial allows us to understand the relationships of colonialism and the time/space relationships of identity formation in two ways. There is a traditional place/time binary relationship that depicts the actual geographies of colonization. Here the postcolonial refers to a shift in global relations where power relations have shifted from simplistic binaries. It allows us to reread and

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, "When was the Post-Colonial? Thinking at the Limit," The Post-Colonial Question, Iain Chambers, ed., (London: Routledge, 1996)

deconstruct colonial history understanding these binary interpretations as culturally bound. Conversely rereading and reinscribing discourse through the prism of the postcolonial can help us to understand the vertical and horizontal structures of power and the way these texts are then reinscribed with the narratives of the postcolonial. The geographical space is remade and identity is also reconstructed through the particularities of spatial and social relations. Mani and Frankenberg also illustrate this through their depiction of a contextualized politics of location and the multi-layering of identity. They demonstrate that political identity is fluid in that it is social relations and the specificity of any given set of social relations which work to form and transform identity.<sup>11</sup>

Frankenberg and Mani point out that not all societies are postcolonial in the same way, that postcolonialism points to a flux of relationships that do not operate in a vacuum. Postcolonial relations are not fixed but are rather defined and redefined contextually. This context refers to the place in which a subject is located. In other words, it is the place as it refers to another and as it occupies the various sub-places that define the identity of the person. Mani and Frankenberg contend that what is defined as a politics of location is critical for both specifying the value and limits of the term postcolonial. Not all societies are postcolonial in the same way, that postcolonialism points to a flux of relationships that do not operate in a vacuum. Postcolonial relations are not fixed but are rather defined and redefined contextually. What Mani and Frankenberg and Stuart Hall help us to understand through the concept of

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<sup>11</sup> Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality' and The Politics of Location," Cultural Studies, May 1993, p.292-310.

postcolonial relations is that spaces are not fixed, rather they are fluid. The social relations that depict a politics of location are always changing, these relations are fluid and a constant posturing and reposturing of space and place is always in process. Mani and Frankenberg elucidate this point by bringing together the postcolonial and politics of location in autobiography.<sup>12</sup> This personalizing of space demonstrates the fluidity of spatial relations and the power structures constructing these varying, everchanging politically charged spaces. The politics of location helps to demonstrate how identity, political identity, is not fixed but is everchanging, it is being constructed and reconstructed depending on the social relations, or social space, in which this identity is posed. It is the metaphor of location which allows for a politicized identity. It renders identity visible by giving it a place to stand. In this sense it can be empowering or disempowering. The imposition of a relative location is a factor in rendering social location both fluid and fixed and imposing a class structure as is represented in where one is placed on a social ladder for example. What renders identity and the metaphor of location more revealing is that it identifies the subject as speaking from not only one place. Mani's example of the multiple locations from which she speaks help to elucidate this point.

Mani and Frankenburg's experience of the politics of location and the particularities of subjective location are also useful in understanding the narratives which relate to power. We understand the structures of power that seem to be more or less fixed; class race, gender, sexuality and so on. It is the point at which the subject enters into the structures, the relations of power and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.296-7.

sites of power which create the maps for an identity which is politically marked. Pile and Thrift suggest that different pathways help to elucidate the terrain of the subject or, in this case, the formation of political identity markers. They suggest focusing on new places from which to speak which works by way of emptying existing categories of their power.<sup>13</sup> By example they point out Monique Wittig's work, who proposes denying the category of woman and introducing the lesbian as the third sex. Here the dynamic of male as the originator of sex or gender and woman as the 'other' is smashed.<sup>14</sup>

There is nothing essential attached either to geographical space nor to the subject. Curiously spatial metaphor serves to ground social meaning. It provides the foundation for that which is in flux. While we must avoid an essential geography, a pre-given map of social meanings which are necessarily rife with power, we also want to avoid a slide into relativism in understanding and exploring the fixity of spatial meaning. We must acknowledge that space, geography is itself socially constructed. While nations struggle to reify their arbitrary boundaries into some kind of fixed historical narrative of the nation the boundaries are becoming increasingly unclear. As migration and globalization trends continue to expand the paradox of the border becomes increasingly contradictory. Geographies are currently changing as nationals migrate across borders as part of a postcolonial project. Diasporic intellectuals find themselves migrating from their postcolonial nations to take up residence in new geographical spaces that change the face of various political biographies. Therefore, in Black critical analysis in Britain, for example, new spaces are

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<sup>13</sup> Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, eds., 1995.

<sup>14</sup> Monique Wittig, The Straight Mind and other essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)

being sought out in an attempt to go beyond relocation and displacement and carve out new meanings. As space is not absolute neither are the metaphors of spatial logic. To disentangle this let us examine the fluidity of the geographical spatial markers.

The analysis of a spatial logic allows us to see how both geography and metaphor become sites of power. The fluidity is not only limited to space itself but becomes part of the geography of power as well. Foucault introduced the notion of power relations in a geographical context without perhaps elucidating the notion of fluidity and exchange of meaning between geography and metaphor. Nonetheless Foucault explores the relationship between space, geography and metaphor, and power. He focuses on the relationships between, for example, the notion of displacement and the power plays conducted by armies who are displaced and are also in the field of displacing.<sup>15</sup> He examines the strategies involved in politico-power relationships, or power/knowledge, as he terms it, and how these strategies are played out in perhaps physically displaced ways and yet they cover the entire society. Power/knowledge can be analyzed in geographical terms; for example, region, territory, domain etc. "There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory." The terms then are an indication of how power inscribes itself into our discourses and would indicate, therefore, these processes being inscribed into our social relations. What Foucault helps us to understand is

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<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p.68.

that deciphering discourse through the use of spatial metaphors helps us to understand where discourse deploys strategies based on relations of power.

Foucault's deconstruction of the deployment of power/knowledge strategies is very useful in understanding the logic of spatialized social relations and the specificities of identity construction in a marked landscape. Clearly, it is evident how these relationships are constructed in a colonized space. Where the actual geography is occupied by an imperial power, as in a colonized context, which imposes a set of complex structures based on a power/knowledge and race or ethnic strategies, identity construction is also clearly based on the complexities of location vis-à-vis the other. This is how we can understand real space social relations and how politically charged absolute space is in its contemporary implications. The colonized occupies specific physical space to which they are relegated by the dominant power. By the same token the colonized occupies a 'sub-altern' space in social relations which relegate him to an-'other', submissive and marginalized space or class. However, it is important to remember that these relations are localized themselves. This means that the spatial, and therefore class/race relations are specific to various local political and social relations. The structure of power and these power relations determine the way that these spaces are inscribed with meaning so that ideology and state apparatus locally inscribe spaces through historical and ideological signification that becomes embedded in social relations.

Through his exploration of the narrative in the construction of the subject, Radhakrishnan helps us to understand the complexity in the construction of political identity not only in spatial terms but also in terms of

the positioning or posturing of various subspaces.<sup>16</sup> He states that 'the microstructure of experience and the macrostructure of political forces' are both melded and separated in analysis.<sup>17</sup> In other words the personal experience and political relations are both inseparable from one another and yet contrast against each other when their relationship is deconstructed. Radhakrishnan stresses living in what he terms 'the tension' of the self and the world and their complex relationship. In his examination of the narrative form of self perception in Nadine Gordimer's novel and then through the essays of Edward Said, the subject position in a collective identity is further problematized in these contexts. The language employed itself signifies the complexity of location. When we examine a context we are looking at multiple locations as we examine first, the various political spaces from which the subject identity is constructed and, secondly, the subject position as it is located vis-à-vis the other. The complexity of the posturing of these subspaces becomes more apparent. How a subspace becomes dominant depends on location, the political or social location of the subject vis-à-vis the other. These spatial relations and discourses can be used for projects of social domination as they can be reinscribed and reappropriated for a new understanding of projects of liberation or a postcolonial politics of location.

The way in which we define geographical space and the particular character of these places can be sites of battle for various social groups from issues such as where to live, to the identification of a place within a given culture. These actual sites or geographies are imbued with meaning imparted

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<sup>16</sup> Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p.126-129.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.126-129.



by both the groups who adopt them as well as the structures that impose meaning upon them. As such, the identification with these sites is partly created and partly adopted. Whatever the source, these sites become imbued with the power of resistance which recodifies the space. What this indicates is the shift from space to place. How does this shift take place? It is difficult to discuss the politics of identity, multiculturalism, alterity and difference in abstraction from material circumstance and from political project. The manifestation of political project is the realization of upsetting social order and recognizing its contingency.

## **The Power of the Spatial Metaphor in Identity construction**

To explore further the concept of spatialized understanding of identity means to reimagine the traditional enlightenment conception of a centred identity. What this also allows us to conceptualize is a discursive notion of the self which is both contradictory, shifting and multiple in nature. It refers to an identity which is made up of heterogeneous notions of race, class and gender. The notion of an empowered speaking position then is born of a 'decision to reclaim one's identity from a history of multiple assimilations and insist upon it as a strategy'<sup>18</sup>. The impulses to find new places from which to speak are found most frequently in writings on feminism and postcolonialism amongst others. The articulations of these new subjectivities are born of the desire to create new positive identities which are neither essentialized nor subject to the dubious label of a relativistic validity. Returning to Mani and Frankenburg, they articulate the experience of the way in which the postcolonial subject lives difference. Living difference is not a pre-given set of ethnic or cultural traits but is a process of negotiation where the self is never total but is always in the process of becoming. What is conspicuous and always present, as Keith and Pile have attempted to clarify, is that space is a central concept to the politics of location. Space is used to ground discussions and to take them on where space and place become central to both a multifaceted foundation and an antirelativistic understanding of difference.

As Elspeth Probyn proposes that 'unlike the chickens which are presumably sexed one way or the other, once and for all, a gendered self is constantly reproduced within the changing mutations of difference. While its

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<sup>18</sup> Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift, eds., 1995, p.17

sex is known, the ways in which it is constantly re-gendered are never fixed or stable.<sup>19</sup> This signifies the power and fluidity of social relations and their ability to imbue meaning according to subject position. Therefore metaphorical space cries out difference and the meaning of that difference at any given time or place. This functions in the same way that actual territory experiences power shifts and completely destroys power relations that are in place. Power relations are made and remade according to the social relations that are produced in or over a territory at any given time. The complexity of the power shifts that took place in Kosovo, for example, with the capitulation of Milosovic and the arrival of NATO troops there is a stunning example of the many ways that the posturing of spaces takes place. Embedded social practices stylize subjectivity and in the case of Kosovo have created politicized identities, ethnic Albanian and Serbian.<sup>20</sup> Ernest Laclau states that there is a lack at the centre of any identity and it is for this reason that 'one needs to identify with something because there is an originary and insurmountable lack of identity'. As Laclau points out difference or identity is articulated in relation to that which is not, a lack and identity is therefore articulated through the 'historical moment of enunciation' otherwise known as contingency.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, identity, difference is located relationally and relational or actual identities are never fully constituted since relations do not form a closed system. This articulation of the contingency of identity formation through a localized/nationalized/gloablized set of social relations reiterates or clarifies the impact of location on identity formation. It is important to point out that Richard Rorty's discussion on

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<sup>19</sup> Elsbeth Probyn, Sexing The Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Theory (London: Routledge, 1993)

<sup>20</sup> Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, 1995, p.6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.28.

contingency, as contingency is central to meaning in social relations, can aid in understanding its impact. Rorty examines the evolution of discourse on a time continuum and how changing identities change discourse and its impact.<sup>22</sup> This is clear when we consider the discourse on postcolonialism and postmodernism.

Fredric Jameson first clearly expressed the claim that contemporary culture is increasingly characterized by the metaphors of space and spatial logic and states ' a model of political culture appropriate for our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern.<sup>23</sup> As I have attempted to indicate the posturing of these metaphorical spaces takes place in a context which is necessarily politicized. Here, the question opens up as to whether or how these posturings are, or can be, strategically placed. Iris Marion Young suggests that the desire on the part of feminist groups to construct an ideal of community has lead to a state of exclusion and borders while it homogenizes and represses difference within the group itself. Young rejects a liberal notion of justice and proposes a new conception of social justice, which recognizes that no social group can be totally unitary or have members that hold to a single identity. Unfortunately Young seems to fall into a compartmentalization of difference at this point, essentializing race, class and difference itself. Here Young limits the possibility of the locational metaphor by failing to recognize that the meaning of the individual's identity is a point of location; that the location itself is relative and changing. Conversely Adrienne

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

<sup>23</sup> Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p.79.

Rich recognizes and questions the politics of the base map through which different locations are drawn as well as the relationship between the relationality of social location and that of geographical location. These relationships or relationalities apply not only to an 'us versus them' scenario but also apply to a redefining of the group itself.

This emphasis on spatial metaphor works as a new way to understand the subject, person, identity and body. Frequently these metaphors have tended to cluster around ideas of movement, travel and mobility in perhaps a more geographical sense. Politically, these significations allow for the opening up of what Pile refers to as third spaces.<sup>24</sup> In terms of what this might mean for work on ethnicity, there is a potential space for more open notions of self, society and social relations based on a more cosmopolitan notion of the flux of space and a new resulting syncretism. Subjects are sites of perpetual motion, in perpetual motion who necessarily influence one another in their movement. This movement results in both a perpetual syncretism and a constantly moving scale of difference measured against the specificities of this motion. In other words, difference cannot be essentialized or encapsulated as the specificities of difference are particular to the subject. In addition the relationship between the specificities of the subjects locates them in particular spaces. This relationship can be identified in the realities of diasporic life. The particularities of members of a diaspora and their relationships to one another as well as their lived place in the world characterizes this experience. This ethics of difference, as identified by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, encourages a new openness based upon freedom of movement over borders and boundaries for new expressions of

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<sup>24</sup> Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, 1995, p.19

self and subject position. This suggests, a fragmentation, an incompleteness, and an ongoing sense to the narrative that is the subject defined by space, place and other particularities. The ensuring separateness and inseparability of the spaces of representation and representations of space take form in what we could label a political 'surface of articulation' as Keith and Pile state. Therefore, as was previously suggested, space as geography and the meanings infused into this geography as well the radical space of sites of identity become central to a current understanding of identity construction. Space and place are integral to political location, be it actual landscape or the mapping out of identity construction.

We have established that politicized space is represented, largely, in two ways. Spaces, physical spaces, are themselves politicized through various means and the political meanings change and radicalize over time. As Pile and Thrift point out the wharf area, canary wharf, in London, the actual physical space had a recent history of being inhabited by working class and poverty stricken Londoners. The resistance to the colonization of this space by industrial gentrification represents not the resistance to change or the notion that once places are marked by an identity that they are always marked as such. The resistance is rather to the attempt to erase and forget the politically marginalized, in this case what would constitute class warfare where the poor become the targets of an attempt to remark a place and perhaps erase its history. The effective resistance to the remarking and remaking of the docklands is an example of how space is infused with politics and how these political relations play out. Henri Lustiger-Thaler deftly illustrates the remaking of place in his essay on remembering and forgetting history in contemporary

Germany. Lustiger-Thaler's characterization of choosing that which shall be remembered and forgotten according to necessary reinterpretations of a place's history is very powerful.<sup>25</sup> What both of these examples illustrate is the struggle to possess the identity of a place, to be the owner of a given space and infuse it with an identity that then empowers that identity. This physical space is then given an identity, an ethnicity, and a history that empowers or disempowers a class of citizens. Here one is aware of the intersection between the power of memory or inscription, and its social meanings, on a physical space and the power of spatial location vis-à-vis the other. As Pile and Thrift refer to them the 'identity politics of place and the spatialized politics of identity'. Bob Blauner refers to the notion of spatial politics as emanating from the individual and placing the power of identity in no fixed place but rather in a mindset. Where one 'is' contextually is the influence of one owning that position. Therefore, the power of place, home and identity is in some way managed by the impact politics has on one's ability to assume a given space. Conversely, the power to take a space renders it, in some ways, a space of tabula rasa and makes space for new meanings contingent on local social relations. Clearly a separation between geography and space, place and metaphor, when discussing the construction of identity is not possible. The multi-faceted, multi-layering of a spatial identity makes analysis problematic as the metaphorical, political and geographical spaces interchange and shape one another. The influence of power relations on political identity is undeniable in the context of geographical space, i.e. the nation, the making and remaking of borders and the politics

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<sup>25</sup> Henri Lustiger-Thaler, "Remembering Forgetfully" in Vered Amit-Talai and Caroline Knowles, eds., Re-Situating Identities: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Culture (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1996), p.190-217.

inherent in this process. Simultaneously the complexity of social location in a postcolonial, migratory, postliberal world cannot be ignored as a major influence on social relations and their impact on the fluidity of political or politicized identity. The application of a spatial logic into a political discourse has the possibility of providing a kind of emancipatory power as it allows for a clearer understanding of the subtleties of postcolonial social relations and their implication for social location in an increasingly globalized and ungrounded world. Through this discourse we can discuss the logic of posturing of spaces and subspaces and the complexities of the power relations involved in the politics of location and the identity politics of place.



## **Chapter 2 – Black British Experience and the Politics of Location**

This chapter will examine the recent history and contemporary experience of racialized politics in Britain and, in particular, the experience of Black British identity construction and the factors that have impacted on the politicization and racialization of Blackness. How has the politics of Black identity manifested itself in Britain recently and how has Black British experience been politicized? How have Blacks been perceived since the large waves of immigrants began arriving after the second world war? There are several factors that have largely influenced the shaping of Black British identity and have resulted in social relations that made the ideologies of race central to British politics. Immigration policy in Britain that has targeted Blacks in particular by denying rights to British subjects that were not native to England. This has had the effect of marginalizing Blacks and has also been effective in achieving public consent on limiting the immigration of minorities. These policy issues have had a large impact on the politicization of Black experience. Policy has had a negative effect on the way Blacks have been policed in contrast to other citizens and the criminalization of Blacks in particular. In the period following the second world war the immigration of minorities, Blacks amongst them, were welcomed in an effort to rebuild the country. Immigrants were seen as a necessary force to build up the labour market particularly manual jobs which failed to interest natives. Later in this period, resistance to the colouring of England became heightened and this began a period of the combining of both overt and subtle racism. During the Thatcher years Britain's policy towards minorities became enmeshed in a general intolerance to any person or group of

persons perceived to be reliant on the state or simply not autonomous enough, accordingly to British National principles and, in a certain sense, put into question the notion of citizenship and the limits of legally recognized citizenship. Let us see how Black experience in Britain is different from the lived experience of other minorities and how policy and the history of policy making in Britain with regard to immigrant communities has impacted on the space Blacks occupy.

Living a Black identity is particular in Britain. It differs from the Indian, Asian and other visible minority identity experience and differs again greatly from the experience of other white European immigrants. Black Britons, in terms of skin colour, are the darkest and most deeply mystified and stigmatized of all British minorities. There exists a variety of beliefs, socially constructed ideas and deeply ingrained convictions about what Black is and what being Black means. This conception is, in some ways, unique to British society. British policy before, but particularly since the second world war, has been fueled by a specific politics of a basically prejudicial nature. This policy has grown out of immigration practices which have had a monumental impact on Britain. The Black and Indian diasporas, in particular, have had a rich presence in Britain as multitudes of postcolonial citizens have traveled to the heart of the empire to take up residence. Following the second world war a large wave of people migrated to Britain from the Caribbean and Asia. Subsequently substantial numbers also migrated from Africa, particularly from those nations which constituted parts of the British empire. As the vast majority of these non-white immigrants came from the British Commonwealth, they were already British subjects and, therefore, citizens. Political rights, then,

were extended even to first generation immigrants in comparison with, for example, France where citizenship is, until today, granted only to second generation immigrants. During the post-war period in Britain, both leading parties', the Labour and Conservative parties' policies, included a strategy, or non-strategy that sought to depoliticize race issues and ethnic conflict. As long as no opposition, either from within or outside the parties existed, the absence of any policy towards race issues was successful, at least temporarily. However this type of non-decision making policy proved to be a fragile strategy. While the government successfully ignored race and ethnic issues, it had no plan for social integration of the waves of immigrants arriving in Britain in the 50's and 60's. Britain accommodated immigration during this period in order to meet the demands of employers for more labour but did not respond to a growing crisis in affordable housing as well as health care and education. Consequently the competition between immigrants and Britons for limited resources created conflict for which, predictably, immigrants were blamed.

Conversely, politicians had established a liberal public discourse on race relations. This discourse encompasses both a policy of tolerance and a tendency to downplay the possibility of racial disharmony and the politicization of race. Despite the political tone of a liberal perspective toward race relations in government and the resulting depoliticization of racial issues, an undertow of racial conflict became increasingly notable. Consequently politicians never mobilized their constituents to support a liberal platform on race issues. The liberal action then on racial issues was one of non action or to silence any public political discussion of race. Liberal assumptions are that racial or ethnic conflict is, by nature, not open to negotiation or any form of peaceful resolution

and is, necessarily, irrational. It is also assumed that any politicized racial or ethnic issue is bound to lead to social disorder or public violence.

Similarly a liberal debate wages on the subject of citizenship. Whereas citizenship is normally recognized as a legal entitlement, that citizenship is a matter of legal nationality which provides political rights, it is also assumed to confer a sense of full membership in society as well as social acceptance as full members of the community. This approach endorses full social integration of new citizens, in part in an effort to diffuse any potential social conflict and to provide peaceful ethnic relations. Canada created the department 'Multiculturalism Canada' to perpetuate the heritage of immigrants' of various ethnic backgrounds within the strict confines of a framework of a celebration of various patchwork items that supposedly represent the immigrants' heritage while ignoring any political, social and racial issues. This approach has successfully muted any political debate on the politics of citizenship, racial and identity issues, as is similarly the case in Britain. However, this approach does not dissolve the politicization of racially charged conflicts which became more than evident in Britain when right wing politics took on the issue. The government's non-decision strategy was broken by new right conservative members of parliament in the 1960's. The liberal response was weak and had no public support. Any discussion of racial issues within the Conservative party was basically repressed until the mid 70's as part of an effort to downplay any existing racial tension. Clearly this sort of approach led to a repression of smoldering fires that festered until the lid could no longer be held on. This blindness concerning racial issues was challenged in the 1970's by right wing

groups, such as the National Front who embraced a platform of previously unaddressed public concerns related to immigration and other such issues.

By the late 1980's Britain's ethnic minority population numbered over 2.5 million out of a total British population of over 54.5 million indicating a representation of 4.5% of the total population. Black Britons numbered somewhere around 600,000.<sup>26</sup> Immigration into Britain in the 1950's and 1960's, as in other western nations, has contributed to economic growth and a rising standard of living. Immigrant workers have filled a necessary gap in the labour market and have generally been prepared to work longer hours for lower wages in difficult working conditions. Zig-Layton points out that up to 58% of an immigrant population was found to be doing unskilled or semi-skilled work compared with 18% of whites whereas a significant number were skilled men and women.<sup>27</sup> They have contributed more in taxes than they have reaped in benefits. Government and employers have welcomed them as a necessary and cheaper work force. Yet immigrants have clearly not been well received universally. As neighbours, friends or fellow workers the reception was not so formidable. They were seen by those around as competitors for labour, housing and other resources. Immigration provided a stimulus for xenophobia and in circumstances where resources have become scarce, as in a recession, immigrants have immediately become the target of this xenophobia. Therefore while immigrants have been welcomed for their usefulness in the labour market they have equally been rejected or hated for their foreignness. Governments have welcome them as subjects and workers but have been unconcerned with social

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<sup>26</sup> Layton-Henry Zig, The Politics of Immigration (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

integration and housing. The general public may see little advantage at all in immigration and politicians have seized this platform to use to their own advantage demanding tough immigration controls and rearticulate a discourse of racial discord. Despite the huge contribution immigrants have made to the economy and society, the response has been, at best, a grudging acceptance, and, at worst, outright hostility, xenophobia and racism.

Racial prejudice was a factor among Black Britons who had settled in England before the war where they suffered a disproportionate amount of unemployment and poverty. During the war, expressions of goodwill and friendship were prompted by the current conditions and encouraged by authorities even if they shared more negative underlying sentiments towards Blacks. Clearly Britain's opposition to the Nazi's fascist policy would have come into question had they publicly endorsed a domestic racist policy regardless of British nazi tendencies. Nonetheless, the place assigned to immigrant workers or 'new british subjects' in the post war period was of the lowest in terms of social relations. Racial prejudice was as acute as ever and the intersection between race and class tension, Blacks occupying the lowest place on the 'map', was never so evident. In 1967 Political and Economic Planning carried out an influential study documenting the high levels of racial discrimination experienced by immigrants from the Caribbean. In fact amongst the various situations tested, where the study employed black and white actors to apply for jobs, accomodation and car insurance their findings exposed very high levels of racial discrmination. They found that 45% of West Indians interviewed claimed personal experience of racial discrimination; the highest of all ethnic groups.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 47

Surprisingly, discrimination was highest amongst those with the best command of the English language, presumably because they were competing for better jobs. The situational test proved that blatant racial discrimination in employment was taking place on a massive scale. An interesting finding in the study indicated that there was no class discrimination against Blacks; essentially the discrimination applied across the board. This may have indicated a general class assumption towards all Blacks. Building societies or mortgage companies often considered Blacks to be bad risks and they were, therefore, refused mortgages more often than other applicants. In addition, when Blacks were housed by local councils they were often dispersed or placed in inconspicuous housing in order to calm white hostility. Many councils purchased inner city housing to avoid this problem. The result of these practices is well known. Blacks became residentially concentrated in the inner-city areas when housing was cheap and nobody else wanted to live.

In the 1960's the government passed legislation, the Race Relations Act, which encouraged fairness and justice but issued no punishment to those who acted unfairly or unjustly. The Political and Economic Planning (PEP) research, however, gave the Race Relations Board the ammunition necessary to strengthen the legislation. With the support of the Labour party and a positive political climate came the promise of new legislation. However, it was quickly destroyed. With press reports of landings of illegal aliens as well as a sudden influx of British Asians from Kenya, in a hurry to get into Britain before immigration controls were imposed, pressure from the Conservatives impacted on the Labour party. Consequently the Labour party agreed to the imposition of immigration quotas. The bill that was introduced at this time had a provision

which stated that unconditional rights of entry to the UK were restricted to those with close ties to the country by birth, naturalization or descent. Colour represented a certain space, in terms of local geography, housing etc. and how much space could be made available, in social terms, for immigrant populations and certain colours of people were perceived as taking up or claiming more space than others. The changing face of these designated spaces became unacceptable and measures had to be taken to destabilize or undermine these spaces. This bill effectively devalued British citizenship by creating two classes of citizens; one that was subject to immigration controls and the other not. Various committees and boards were also put into place with very vague mandates such as 'to encourage the establishment of harmonious community relations ...' with no specific, concrete and viable platform as to how to combat racism.<sup>29</sup>

With the rise of racial discrimination in the late 50's and early 60's in Britain, particularly following the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots, 'immigration' began to be referred to in the public mind or public discourse as non-white immigration. This misuse of the term immigrant became so prevalent that even second generation Blacks born in Britain were referred to as immigrants. This racism, setting Blacks apart from the white population was never applied to second generation Irish, Italians or Poles. Clearly racial issues were a hot and very touchy political topic. In the 1980's with the election of Mrs. Thatcher, political sensitivity went out the window and a clear platform of right wing libertarian politics came in. Thatcher, as a self-made individualist, had little sympathy for those who felt they had suffered group disadvantages, be

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.55.



they women, ethnic minorities or the working-class. She was critical of campaigns to legislate against barriers to those facing these disabilities and felt that people should fend for themselves. With regard to the immigration issue, she favoured the far right of her party and moved for the most stringent immigration controls of the new commonwealth. While Mrs. Thatcher was hostile to the race relations legislation and the powerful Commission for racial equality she was powerless to dismantle it. The anti-immigrant rhetoric continued to augment during this period with the arrival of more Black and Asian immigrants and this was exploited by the far right. There was a dramatic upsurge in electoral support for the National Front which drove Thatcher to implement massive changes to the Immigration Act which she felt was not strong enough. The Conservative party's platform stressed that in order to maintain racial harmony an immediate reduction in immigration was required. The Conservative's policy towards race relations then was to minimize the presence of colour in Britain. There was also a commitment to a new Nationality Act underway to allay fears of unending immigration and to embrace a rational basis for British citizenship. Later in the 70's, members of the Conservative party engaged in an anti-racist campaign with the Labour party and other left-wing groups. When this came to Mrs. Thatcher's attention she immediately intervened to veto the campaign; however, she was unsuccessful when the committee nonetheless went ahead with the campaign. She made her position crystal clear in a 1978 interview when she stated that 'immigration was too high and she sympathized with those who felt really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture'.<sup>30</sup> She re-

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.184.

established the Conservative government as an anti-immigration government and believed she was in tune with the electorate. Whether the pressure of public opinion influenced Thatcher's immigration policy or her vehement ideological opposition to immigration (and its dangers to Britain and her calculated exploitation of the race issue) influenced the electorate is unclear. Thatcher and the conservatives were elected in 1979 and stayed in power until the early 1990's.

After the Brixton riots of 1981, race related rioting underlining white versus Black tensions in the British urban landscape, the government attempted to explain the cause of Afro-Caribbean youth's rootlessness as the principal cause of the riots. The argument claimed that this rootlessness was a consequence of attempting to transplant alien peoples of alien cultures into British society. Curiously this had never been a problem for those of alien white cultures. Nevertheless, they claimed that growing up in a country that was not theirs meant that Afro-Caribbean youth failed to develop a sense of their identity. They lacked a sense of belonging, their roots, their essential identity lay elsewhere. Other media sources picked up on this rhetoric and emphasized this rationale in a strange twist by contrasting Black and Asian social integration (or lack thereof) in Britain.<sup>31</sup> The contrast compared Blacks apparent inability to integrate into British society with Asians apparent success in this venture. They claimed the Asians' success was related to a paradoxical process of identity formation and passive integration into the larger society. While Asians were better able to maintain their own separate culture, their emphasis on difference by maintaining their whole culture bounding them

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Gilroy, Small Acts (London: Serpents's Tail, 1993), p. 121.

tightly together both as families and as community, has produced Asians who are passive citizens yet hard working. Blacks, conversely, produced a contrasting image of disruptive youth who were also violent. In this image projected by government ideology and policy, Blacks are both unable to maintain a cohesive family life which is related to their lack of a whole culture as well as being unable to view themselves as essentially foreign. They are therefore neither British nor foreign, unable to assimilate yet their culture is not whole enough to hold them together as a community. There has been a concerted effort to downplay the role that racist practice played in these and other riots in Bristol and elsewhere. By pointing out that both Blacks and Whites participated in the riots they were able to turn the focus to the notion that the breakdown of the family was at the root of this discontent. This argument circles back to the general rootlessness and lack of cohesion of family and community amongst Afro-Caribbeans. Clearly this widespread view disseminated by the media strips Blacks of their space in the social order or perhaps imposes a space clearly at the bottom of society, imposes a class, as well as being separate from a dominant culture.

Popular opinion and practice pointed to a disorganized and confused set of cultural practices amongst Blacks and this was reiterated throughout the media calling attention to violence and lack of discipline with deep psychological roots going back to slavery that Blacks brought to Britain, thus pronouncing their genesis as having taken place elsewhere. These ideas about nation and race have been part of the conservative right's ideology going back to the 60's and certainly could have been fuel for a new immigration policy. This type of biological culturalism sees rootlessness as an inevitable product of foreigners

with alien cultural practices settling in Britain in contrast to the environmentalist argument which argues more logically and less emotionally that alienation is a product of disadvantage and discrimination and not vice versa. Therefore, the link between race and culture has been publicly weaved together and essential otherness that links Blacks to violence and foreignness has been forged in public space.

The PSI surveys, a series of surveys undertaken by the Policy Studies Institute since the 1960's studied the way in which ethnic minorities in Britain are carving out a place for themselves in British society. Since the first survey was published in 1966, these surveys have remained the most sophisticated way to assess the progress of British integration of ethnic minorities.<sup>32</sup> The first survey of 1966 found that migrants were overwhelmingly in manual work, despite their acquired skill set, and they were confined to a limited number of industries. The survey also found widespread exclusion to access of housing and were, thus, relegated to living in the worst available housing, in slums that white people had vacated. Objective tests suggested that colour was the main factor and the darker the colour the more likely the discrimination. These objective tests also showed that discrimination persisted despite legislative changes. It was suggested that while suitably educated Asians might be able to progress upwards over a sufficient period of time, that a new proletariat could emerge defined solely by colour.<sup>33</sup> Similar trends identified in the early survey were again found in the later surveys. While Pakistanis and Bangladeshis seem to be subject to the worst discrimination their immigration continues and has skyrocketed since the surveys began. Also significant was the observation that

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<sup>32</sup> Tariq Modood, Ethnic Minorities in Britain (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997), p.339.

Blacks defined themselves differently to Asians. While both Asians and Afro-caribbeans are referred to in Britain as Blacks, they don't necessarily refer to themselves as Black. The study found that when they read out two statements *In many ways, I think of myself as British* and *In many ways I think of myself as ...*(respondent's ethnic group) that 64% of Blacks agreed that they saw themselves as British whereas 31% disagreed. However, 87% agreed with the second statement and only 9% disagreed. On the other hand, conversely, immigration of Blacks had already reached its peak and had tapered off in the 1960's and yet there has been no improvement of the social condition of Blacks in Britain. Black men are still more likely than other visible minorities to occupy positions in manual labour. Also, the progress of ethnic minorities has depended on studying harder and longer than their white peers. Historically it has also depended on their working harder jobs and at their jobs as well as longer hours. Economic geography is relevant in that large numbers of Blacks are concentrated in South-East London, for example, and there has been a build-up in these areas over time of rising unemployment effecting these places contrasting deeply the prosperity in this region. In addition, young Black men are disproportionately without qualifications, without work and a stable family life and disproportionately in trouble in the law or in prison. The PSI studies found that a phenomenon of multiple racisms exists in Britain whereby various forms of racial discrimination exist which use cultural difference to vilify or marginalise or demand cultural assimilation from groups who already experience colour-racism. They also found that ethnic minorities suffer from racial harassment and violence from people in their neighbourhoods, workplace,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p.340.

public places and police officers.<sup>34</sup> They also found that harassment can be found to be normal, a distressing symptom of underlying racism and that most people contribute to harassment by failing to condemn it and, as such, contribute to minorities' feelings of isolation.

In social space power relations take place through the conditions which create the potential for its exercise. Politically one ideology that creates these conditions is that of colour-blindness. Its power lies in its failure to acknowledge the specific dimensions of racism and racial inequality and attempts to address problems through a prism of universality, democracy and equality. As with legislation, the criminal justice system and now the notion of equality, citizenship or universal (human) rights, these ideologies fail to account for the politicization of the subject, individual and group, and the particularities of a subject position or the inequalities of one group versus another. What is particularly binding about the colour-blindness ideology is that it allows the raising of the racism issue to be dealt with calls of divisiveness, an incitement to racial discord and as an invitation to white backlash and an assessment that problems attributed to Blacks are shared equally by the white population.<sup>35</sup> This failure to acknowledge specific problems related to race has policy implications as it meets with resistance to affirmative action. Therefore, special provisions geared towards a specific population may be opposed on the premise of integrated services despite the exclusion of Blacks from such a service or the inappropriateness thereof. Affirmative action has also been opposed on the basis that it creates 'preferential treatment' even when it has been proved that existing practices favour whites and specifically the white middle class. Central

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.353.

policy initiatives in Britain have basically been constituted by an unclear framework of laws, policy statements, directives, reports and consultative machinery in which the issue of race has been negatively formulated as in policies on immigration and policing. It has also produced a loose framework within which local policies can or cannot be developed and has left a whole field of policy undeveloped in dealing with issues of directives, regulations and enforcement of affirmative action at the local level.<sup>36</sup> For example Section 11 of the Local Government Act provided financial compensation from the central government to the local governments to cover expenses related to the resettling of immigrants and 'associated problems'. This served to reinforce negative perceptions of Blacks and legitimize local hostility to their presence. The absence of any framework for positive action allowed local authorities to claim monies for staff salaries excluding any possibility for the development of local programs. With existing local resistance to positive programs the introduction of austerity programs has only fueled and reinforced pretexts for a continued inaction. Within the limits of local budgets, measures could be taken to eliminate institutional racism including expansion of the local Black workforce within the public sector, the creation of participatory structures within local governments to include black organizations, youth counseling services and the allocation of black applicants to council properties equal to that of whites, but they are not undertaken. Cultural traditions of local politicians reinforce a bureaucratic tradition which has proved difficult to challenge. Anti-racist struggle can, however, bring about concrete consequences in the form of an acknowledgement of the creation and maintenance of racial inequality in

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Braham et al, eds. , Racism and Antiracism (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1992), p.206.

institutionalized forms of racism. These struggles also help to redefine the conditions of future struggles. Those involved in political struggle have tried to bring in as many concerned groups as possible in an effort to stop attempts to dismiss anti-racism as not addressing community concerns and isolate and break the already fragile framework of alliances.

While this connection of race, criminality and violence has not always been so closely examined as being tied together, there has been a history of this type of racist imagery in Britain. Beginning in the colonial period and then updated in the 1950's through the media's association of Blacks with prostitution and drugs there has been a perpetuation of the image of Blackness as other; as opposition; as evil. At home Britain was concerned with the moral threat that Blacks posed to White youth. This was reflected in the United States as well where the rise of rock and roll was blamed on the Black rhythm and blues movement. A discussion over the film 'rock around the clock' labeled the film 'musical mau-mau' thereby creating a vivid imagery of restless natives, violent savages responding to anti-colonial movements. Clearly these images, subtly or perhaps more overtly, contributed to the inarticulated fears in the public mind. However, any outright accusation of racist thinking on the part of Britons was met with outrage. This brings into focus the limits of the law in intervening on behalf of equality and how legislation is unable to deal with the politics of race and identity.

Other than institutional racism which designates a given spatialization according to race relations between police and Blacks, or minorities in general, race relations occupy a very specific social space. Stuart Hall articulated it well

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 207.



when he offered the conclusion that 'the police have undertaken, whether willingly or not, to constrain by means which would not long stand up to inspection within the rule of law, an alienated black population and thereby, to police the social crisis of the cities'.<sup>37</sup> Policing acts as the beginning of a process of criminalization which begins with arrest, or even before that with the intent to arrest and as carried through the criminal justice system and far beyond that. There is little data gathered on the subject of what happens to Blacks in Britain once they are arrested, how they are treated, why they are arrested, questions of bail and the conduct of trials. However, in evidence is the suspicion with which Black people are regarded, be it in the criminal justice system or without. During the Notting Hill riots and other riots or confrontations throughout Britain during the 1970's and 1980's, Blacks were methodically arrested at a rate much higher than that of White British youth.<sup>38</sup> Specifically, during the Notting Hill confrontation nine Black youths were brought up on charges of possession of offensive weapons, causing greivous bodily harm, incitement to riot and charges of affray. Eventually all the charges were dropped but Black space was marked by this designation of criminality. In terms of the substantiveness of the charges, they were all easily provable as they required less substantive evidence. The collapse of various cases, however, did not prevent prosecution authorities from bringing charges of conspiracy against the Black community for defending itself against racial violence. These conspiracy charges, in various cases, were a clear attempt not only to criminalize Black protest and obliterate the space from which the Black person/community speaks but it also gave the police the best chance of having

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<sup>37</sup> Stuart Hall, 1979, p.13.

a conviction stick particularly in those situations where there was clearly a lack of hard evidence. Thus, Black people's experience of the criminal justice system demonstrates that the rhetoric of the law does not necessarily apply in the in practice and that legislation is subject to politicization. The Black subject's experience of his place is that it must be muted to have equal access to legal or political rights. Politically and socially, the subject's experience becomes one of marginalization. This is also very telling for the inadequate belief that citizenship be considered strictly a legal issue. Clearly it is necessary to embrace a view that recognizes that citizenship is not only an issue of legal status but one that entitles citizens to a certain public space, privilege and power. A structure of certain social and institutional recognition is necessary that recognizes citizenship as a matter of social mapping and the politicization of racial and ethnic issues. In Britain, even in the aftermath of the Thatcher years no move has been made to recognize the impact Thatcherite immigration policies have had on social relations nor the inefficacy of policy issues surrounding citizenship.

Policy, in addition, attempts to formulate an overarching theory of homogeneity which can signify unity. However, homogeneity as a policy objective can be imposing a crafted understanding and symbolism of the basis of this homogeneity while denying a pluralization of Black identities and a kind of diaspora within the diaspora. On the other hand, from a Black local perspective the notion of celebrating a common, invariant racial identity that links divergent black experience can empower a black space, can create or elevate that space and impose the creation or change of public policy. However, unity does not

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Braham, 1992, p.180.

require homogeneity and attempts to manufacture it cannot be relied on to establish the feelings of connectedness to harness and empower a sense of sameness. The space in which the discourse surrounding black culture takes place is critical to its legitimacy then and the production of oppositional subjectivities is critical to black political space. Anti-racial state policies have the adverse effect of massaging and therefore undermining this activity and perpetuates subordination and the imposition of an absolute identity. The dynamics of these power relations are concealed through a variety of symbiotic interdependencies that have a vested interest in black culture and the commodities associated with these political dimensions. In addition, the political dimension has the effect of being drained by the commodification of black space by marketing black culture which is also crossed over to white consumers who take pleasure in the transgression and danger of this activity while dismissing the history of Black struggles for slavery, citizenship and equality.<sup>39</sup>

The liberal conception of equality argues that equality of opportunity and rights exists when all individuals are enabled freely and equally to compete for social rewards. It is the role of the policy maker to reinforce and referee this conception of rights. While liberals theoretically abhor the concept of privilege they believe that natural ability and talent are random and assert the necessity of state regulation of society in order to obtain the maximum freedom and liberty for all. This ignores the structural sources of social inequality. Equal opportunity policy in Britain has shown no relation to stimulating change in

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Gilroy, 'There ain't no Black in the Union Jack' (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.4.

employment for black people.<sup>40</sup> The same response system has been in place in relation to racial segregation which is sharply defined against a mapped out, carved out logic for Black spaces. Racial segregation is another means for reproducing racial inequality. Neither central practices nor locally sensitive programs have undermined this process. While Britain has no history of any kind of enforced social separatism based on racial grounds and theoretically all permanent residents have equal rights of citizenship systematic inequities persist. These inequities must be reproduced through material forces and are also legitimized by appeal to what is considered to be normal, reasonable, tolerated and advanced in liberal democracy. A society that bases its image on a just and egalitarian society also has made it possible for spatial differentiation to be an index of racial inequality.<sup>41</sup>

Racial, spatial segregation is the outcome of both policy and politically constructed phenomenon. It is a symbol by which Black people experience social life. Political discourse can be an index in which specific policies and actions are embedded. By exploiting the power of rhetoric by appealing to specific demands of constituents, governments end up with normative support for spatially segregating policy. A reshaping of race issues has become important to government over the past decade or so in combining monetarist policy with popular authoritarianism in a British version of the new right (no so different from a north american or european interpretation of such). A new racism has also developed with this and recent trends in the politics of race have been reflected in a new interpretation of segregation or spatial politics of race. Notwithstanding the anti-racist commitment of a new Labour government

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Braham, 1992, p. 248.

or Labour controlled local authorities, there has been little new impression of race-related legislation in recent years. Neo-liberalism which is the ideology embraced by the new right is based on free market principles. These free market principles or monetarist policy is centred on the individual and denies any group characteristics including notions of race as playing any role in public life. Evidently race or racism is not recognized as a variable that has any impact on policy, politics or social life and neither has any bearing in the economic sphere. Although the principles of neo-liberalism recognize the 'integrity' of the individual they also make them responsible for achievement and failure. The state, then, sets markets free but does nothing to regulate competitors. While the principles of individualism can be praised for denying the innate reality of race it can also be criticized for ignoring the tenacity of race as a social construction which houses real political, social and economic consequences. This reverence for the market ignores systematic inequality which is a product of it and has failed to acknowledge the accumulating disadvantage that Black Britons have faced.

In fact, the new right seems to be more concerned politically with a supposed demise of morality, of which Black Britons seem to be a major propogator, than the state of the economy. The new right seems to be less concerned with individual's opportunities in the market place than with collective responsibility for social control. The loss of social control has brought strategies into play designed to strengthen traditional institutions including the family and the promotion of law and order. As discussed earlier the breakdown of the Black family in Britain has been historically targeted as a source of

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<sup>41</sup> Susan J. Smith, The Politics of 'Race' and Residence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.105.

disconnection and disengagement from British society. The key to moral renewal has focused on the notion that a sense of solidarity is lodged in national pride. This theory has prompted the renewal of 'one nation conservatism' which espouses the view that, in the interests of collective responsibility, it is natural to form a bounded community, a nation aware of its differences from other nations.<sup>42</sup> If one espouses this view, then 'it is in our biology, our instincts, to defend our way of life, traditions and customs against outsiders – not because they are inferior, but because they are part of different cultures'.<sup>43</sup> By simply eliminating a discourse of race and replacing it with one of culture, there is a semblance of celebrating difference rather than imposing any position of inferiority. By asserting this reasonable concept of difference rather than an effacing fact of inequality, this discourse is able to depict cultural boundaries as a kind of benign expression of identity not as an evident assertion of power. While these beliefs may be pervasive, expressions about morally neutral, socially natural defense of one's cultural heritage are difficult to sustain. This discourse increasingly works to exclude Black Britons from concepts such as 'the British nation', 'British culture' and the like. These views from the right sustain a political imagery in which race, which is referred to as culture or ethnicity, correspond to social difference but do not, in theory, impinge on any notion of individualism or equality. For decades politicians agreed that segregation was related to the number, concentration and location of immigrants of colour and the solution lay in cultural adjustment and social mobility coupled with residential dispersement. In seeking to diminish the visibility of racial disadvantage and to dilute the impact of immigration on whites, dispersal

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Gilroy, 1993, . p.128.

became a winning political goal. While British politicians have seen racial segregation as a problem for the past 40 years, in addressing this problem the focus has consistently been centred on the injustices of racial inequalities but rather on the sensibilities of white voters confronted with the spectre of overcrowding, competition for scarce resources and the insecurity associated with public disorder. The problem of segregation persists to today as one that addresses racial categories as real, that sustain a socially constructed language of that which constitutes race.

Resistance to ideology and policy structure is negotiable. It is possible for people to attack the material reality and ideological persistence of racial segregation through social action. In this sense public behaviour can be seen as being social, economic and political in its orientation; that social interaction is a struggle for the power necessary to bring about these facets of daily life. While racial segregation has acted to inform a racially exclusive nationalism in Britain, it has also been a point used to legitimize repressive action in the state that is required on occasion to reinforce the legitimacy of the state. Paul Gilroy points out that seeing the Black population as a malignant part of the inner city reinforces an image of incompatibility with the notion of what it is to be British but also justifies the law and order campaign in place and the popular revival of moral authoritarianism.<sup>44</sup> As a politically constructed problem, this lends legitimacy to the notion of a volatile black inner city, which works to sustain segregation and perpetuate white supremacy. In addition, from a political perspective, racial segregation is not only a tool for the perpetuation of racial inequality, but it also can potentially be a source of power. It could be a

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Gilroy, 1991.

platform from which concessions, both short term and long, could be negotiated in the interest of rights and a different kind of public life. This notion has been rejected, though, on the basis that the most fundamental political unit, the voting public, has been a power in sustaining segregation. However, it would seem that symbolically, political and social meaning attached to race has already been used in not only sustaining segregation but also in imbuing spatial politics with meaning. The fact that race and its meanings are negotiated and renegotiated according to bases of power reinforces the spatial segregation associated with race both from a geographical perspective, in terms of actual segregation, and the incompatibility of a social group's identity, but also in spatial terms which are largely metaphorical. They allocate position in which power bases decide from where a subject speaks and what place the subject has in public discourse.

If British nationality is a racially exclusive concept, residential differentiation, then, becomes bound into politics. This demonstrates how space is politicized. Paying lip service to a multi-ethnic home states only so long as the rainbow of skin colour and ethnicity doesn't outnumber the fixed and trans-generational 'natives' clearly underlines the discourses of who belongs. The notion that space can be place specific or relational is clearly stated here when spaces or political cultures become points of negotiation where one is constantly reminded of his otherness. As Tuku Mukherjee attests to his experience in becoming a Black teacher in Britain, his shock in experiencing teacher training college. He states 'the sense of disappointment and outrage that this sanctuary of White liberal culture, with its proclaimed values of

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<sup>44</sup> Susan J. Smith, 1989, p.180.



tolerance and humanity, should have been so profoundly racist. It was a more subtle racism than the insults and humiliations I had encountered as I roamed from low paid job to low paid job; it was a racism of silent collusion and polite denial.<sup>45</sup> He also remarks that growing up an ethnic minority in Britain equips one with the knowledge that the external view or identity imposed by others has little to do with the inner meaning of one's life. The experience of this racism, different from the popular racism of the shop floor nevertheless brings home the location of race and class. Colour, therefore, is not the only element at play in the multi-ethnic maps drawn up by race relations boards and such. Solidarities and enemy lines are built upon the dynamics of caste which remain central. These dynamics are central to a politics of location which underpin social location based upon a historically contingent and significant understanding of race. This conception of race socially classes, locates, and relegates according to an overt racism as well as a covert racism of polite denial and silent collusion. Returning once again to Mani's experience of classing according to colour, as a non-white in the university without questioning it was assumed she was either engaging in some type of criminal activity or it was the wrong hour for her to be present in this environment; this was not her place. She was imposed a racist external view which located her outside the university. Similarly, the domestic worker, also Black, located in a different class, imposed another view, creating a caste system within and without. Whereas prejudices against Asians are as much based on culture as colour, the colour of Black has so largely been mythologized by British culture that colour is sufficient for a pervading and

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<sup>45</sup> Philip Cohen and Harwant S. Bains, eds., "Multi-Racist Britain", (London: MacMillan Education Limited, 1988), p.211.

tenacious racism that exists not only institutionally but is manifest in all aspects of social life. While Britain is forced to confront its own myths of cultural unity or racialized purity, the response has been to reject, isolate and socially alienate subjects of global migration, be they British subjects or not. The assumption that, at some point, migration ends and assimilation/integration and upward mobility begins is, if anything, an indefinite process of negotiating identity, difference and the right to exist in a given context.

For subordinate, racialized groups the process of mapping out one's place is not only understanding and negotiating the given set of social relations but challenging them, remapping them, negotiating and renegotiating the complex meanings of a politics of location, in particular, the local and the history therein. The dominant collective memory occupies more space and, by extension, more collective importance. Present is a tension in the notion that some citizens are linked to 'other' belongings, other spaces, other loyalties. In this way, cultural pluralism works to exclude the 'other' from the mainstream discourses of public space. However, the 'newness' of the subject in Britain, Blacks in Britain in particular, represents an empty logic. The meaning rests in excluding the minority from the processes of a democratic conception of citizenship. Manifest is a tension in the rhetoric of citizenship which claims to recognize, which professes that all subjects share equally in public space but seems to do so through exclusionary practice. This tension brings us back to the idea that there is present in social relations an undercurrent of an unspoken understanding that citizenship is not purely a legal issue. The legal aspect of citizenship seems to be marginal and unimportant. It is the lack of

recognition of minorities as full citizens, enjoying the same rights, the same public space and the same political space as their white counterparts, co-citizens, neighbours that is really at issue. Clearly Britain is still suffering the effects of a Thatcherite brand of racially coded, populist and nationalist conservatism. The idea that individual development, hard work and persistence are all that is necessary for social progress have fueled the expansion of Black business but it has been in a small way that has had little effect on the larger community. This has had an important impact on the terms of black political discourse as it has detached any automatic loyalty to the party that negotiated the Race Relations Act. What this demonstrates also is a reflexive, self-critical response from the Black community in Britain despite their historical and also contemporary victimization in an attempt to change in a radical sense subject position.

### **Chapter 3 - Black spatial identity in Britain**

This chapter attempts to examine Black's perception of their space as a result of British public policy and the ideology influencing that policy and the lived history of Blacks in Britain. How has a politics of diversity, disadvantage and ethnic identity worked to inform the spatial construction of Black political identity in Britain? How is the immigrant experience, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Black experience in Britain informed culturally, politically and socially by spatial understanding of social relations? First, arguably Black British experience is informed by how we understand, the history that, in turn, informs that understanding and the relationship between race and a politics of location. While immigrants are encouraged to, or sense the need to, assimilate as much as possible in order to integrate into British society, they are simultaneously ridiculed for such an undertaking as full assimilation will never be possible as distinguishing features will always mark them.<sup>46</sup> How do social alienation, space and place, racism and immigration interconnect to have a undeniable and powerful impact on one another?

Racial identity is perhaps a fiction that is used for political purposes. In a living culture, one that is changing and growing perpetually, identity and the subject of identity has no essence, is not fixed. The homeless is a vehicle; a constant moving object occupying no specific place but being in constant movement, having no dot on the map. Turned out of the private spaces of the real estate market the homeless occupies public space but their consequent presence in the public landscape is fiercely contested. The gentrification of

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<sup>46</sup> Layton-Henry Zig, 1992.

public space means the displacement, dislocation of the other; the homeless, those deemed racially inappropriate. Whose space is it anyway? Is public property really public is it, in fact, private? In London's docklands the Thatcher government, under the ideology of the regeneration of the inner city Urban Development Corporations have free reign to create companies, subsidize existing companies, develop or dispose of land and building as they see fit. The revival of the Docklands has moved to displace inner city residents for economic profit and also in attempt to rewrite history, or to rewrite the spatial logic of the docklands themselves. In so doing the social landscape becomes reinscribed with prosperity and erases or eradicates the social problematic of the displaced by again displacing them and unloading them of social and spatial meaning. Therefore as Mani and Frankenburg pointed out the minority, infused with a social logic of poverty is also emptied of social meaning and therefore is unable to occupy a given social space. Mani, not recognized for her position in the university, cannot occupy any meaningful social space unless she claims it back for herself.

The notion that Blacks represent a problem or a series of problems in Britain persists. In fact, this goes to the heart of racist reasoning . Equally pernicious is the idea that Blacks, though able to feel, lack the ability to think.<sup>47</sup> This notion objectifies Blacks; they are no longer subjects but merely objects to whom an identity can be given. This objectification of the subject's identity or the political act of assigning identity is an accepted subtle, pernicious and extremely powerful social practice. This accepted practice is also internalized by those attempting to assimilate. The subject is relegated to occupying a given

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Gilroy, 1991, p.7

political landscape and his location in this metaphorical geography is both thrust upon him and internalized by him. The discourse of racialized social practice locates, by default, the subject and assigns a given political identity or a spatialized identity from which he speaks, or only one place from which he is recognized. This practice has the powerful function of pushing race outside of history and attempts to transform it into a natural event. Race is also viewed as an external function of social relations which can be rectified if the correct ideological tools are used to fix it. This attitude relegates race to a peripheral function and not an essential part of the patterns of social life and endorses the view of Blacks representing an external problem.

In Britain, race cannot be properly understood if divorced from social relations. It is not marginal to the way in which British society has developed and worked to define the emergence of contemporary political identity. By defining race and ethnicity as cultural absolutes we endorse these as inevitabilities, a biological absolute about social relations. Katherine Verdery suggests that there is a kind of person who 'has' an identity and who is the product of a specific historical process which is the process of nation building. This has entailed a variety of processes, not the least of which has been to launch great efforts by the state to keep track of, control and manage citizens. She states: 'Not only the forging of various identities has been important in effecting this control but also the idea that to *have* identities are crucial tags by which state-makers keep track of their political subjects; one cannot keep track of people who are one thing at one point, another thing at another.'<sup>48</sup> While these notions seem to be well mired in the public social conscience, a spatial

conception of a construction of political identity can be useful in the deconstruction of a racialized identity politics. A narrative is constructed and woven around and then fixed to a group identity and the group is unable to extract itself from the location to which it has been fixed. Race is the object of racist discourse and has no other meaning outside of it. It is an ideological construct and is not an empirical social category. In this case it signifies a set of imaginary properties of inheritance which embody or legitimate real positions of social domination and subordination. These positions are points on a social map. They designate a social position, the location of other, fueled by a socially constructed category of race and its dimensions they describe the location of subordination and domination and infuse the story of race with meaning.

Historically Black people have occupied a so-called privileged place as the object of a natural science of man. Here, they were likened to wild beasts, apes driven by brutal instincts which needed to be tamed by disciplinary measures or as noble savages uncorrupted by civilization. They were made out to lack the faculties of reason, morality and law. This gave a prerogative to the English as master race but also laid the groundwork for the unbalanced social relations in Britain which fuel a racially charged environment. This reasoning lent rationale to a discourse of repression and paternalism which, though more sophisticated today, the same set of distinctions applies to the Black community today. Whenever Blacks threatened to break out of these positions a new campaign of misrepresentation was launched to keep them in their place.<sup>49</sup> This constituted placing them as a missing link between human and

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<sup>48</sup> Katherine Verdery, "Ethnicity, nationalism, and state making," in Anthropology of Ethnicity, Vermeulen and Govers, eds. (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994)

<sup>49</sup> Philip Cohen, 1988, p. 20.

animal on the very edge of a map of humanity. In this way they also became an even more strategic site for normalizing intervention. This lays out an essential groundwork and deeper understanding for the both the criminalization of Blacks as well as the disproportion of Blacks in prisons and in difficulty with the law. In this way the Black is no longer simply the other, but is a hybrid being between nature and culture which clearly goes against civil society. Philip Cohen points out that ethnicity is, in a certain way, inseparable from social class, noting that location is indelibly wrapped in identity. He states that 'ethnicity, unlike race, refers to a real process of historical individuation – namely the linguistic and cultural practices through which a sense of collective identity or 'roots' is produced and transmitted from generation to generation, and is changed in the process. But that change is inseparable from class struggle. Social classes are collective historical agents defined by their antagonistic place in the social division of labour... It is these dimensions of class reproduction which may well become articulated through ethnicity and race.'<sup>50</sup> Here ethnicity and race become interchangeable in a way which can serve to mobilize antiracist forces which assume deterministic beliefs about self and society. However, it can also rest on biological arguments and then can be used to understand ethnicity in reified form that works to further marginalize that other England that is not white and middle-class.

Although Blacks are referred to in contemporary British politics and culture as external to the imagined community or the British nation these representations are precarious constructions, discursive figures which cloud deeper relationships. Black oppositional practice, which challenges narrow

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<sup>50</sup> PhilipCohen, 1988, p.24.



conceptions of anti-racism, demonstrates the simultaneity of sites of both race and class and the complexity of this relationship. This becomes evident in 'Black expressive cultures which spring up at the intersection of race and class, providing a space in which competing claims of ethnic particularity and universal humanity can be temporarily settled.'<sup>51</sup> Black culture is actively made and remade. This notion points to the making and remaking of political identity in a Black context but also takes into account the particularities of identity construction, the fluidity of culture and its constantly flux nature. Black Britain as political entity finds it a necessity to identify itself as a diaspora. One could say diaspora within diaspora where racial particularity or authenticity is denied. By definition it then draws inspiration from unique cultures developed by Black populations everywhere.

Black oppositional practice in Britain sites the complexity of relationships struggling for a common space from which to speak. The reflexive, self-critical perspective of black politics in Britain point to a new perspective of self and sociality, which, in turn, points to the ability of Black communities to assume a place for change in spite of historical conditions of victimization and its continuing legacy for something more challenging and radical, as agents of change in the struggle towards a substantial liberation and decolonization both geographically and metaphorically. Racial formation then is, in a certain way, a local process. Local processes are systems of symbolic meaning. The representation of space is largely one of symbolic meaning but this does not mean that meaning is empty. It is highly charged and heavily weighted. However, it is essential to understand the social symbolism that constructed

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Gilroy, 1991, p.154

these meanings and understand them as a kind of fragmentation, not bounded entities but perhaps building blocks constructed from and upon local cultures, local and national political culture and lingering colonial-postcolonial psychological occupation.

By reading the space around us we are inscribing it with meaning. By reading a geography of inner city-space as poor, criminal and immigrant we are inscribing it with a multi-layering of meaning. This space is designated as racially inscribed, as belonging to a lower economic class and inhabited by criminal elements and therefore more deserving of police presence. Inevitably these layers of meaning become interweaved, egged on by a history of racial incompatibility stamped on memory by a colonial history. Weaved into this, of course, in the implicit understanding that Black is likely criminal, poor and potentially otherwise aberrant. Identity like race is a story, constructions of 'our people, other people' where meanings are not necessarily compatible and can be grounded in the idea of space and place. An understanding of space and place work to inform the discussion of race and identity construction by breaking allowing for a deconstruction of racial logic and the deeply embedded meaning structures developed around this logic. By deconstructing the power structures around this logic it is possible to expose the complex structural beliefs imposed from without as well as those absorbed from within. In addition, the acceptance of an essential notion of race can also be deconstructed by the tools associated with an understanding of a spatial prism as a view to identity construction.

The dominant tendency in currently is to define immigration as a single movement in space and a single moment in time. The focus falls on the act and leaves out the the generation plus of fallout. The life-long process of negotiating

one's identity in the new place, and even the following generations act of identity construction and reconstruction is the larger social byproduct of changing social geography. Global migration has disrupted static conceptions of identity, challenging notions of cultural homogeneity, essentialism and other stereotypes. The social struggles of the future, therefore, will be built around wider and more ambiguous ranges of identity where emerging collective actions will be able to challenge national and global strategies of homogenization and control. The power of race politics can be used as a general argument for conceptions of ideology which emphasize referential conceptions of meaning. Race is not the simple expression of biological or ethnic sameness but it is wholly imagined, a social and political construction and the contingent processes from which they emerge are in some way linked to similarly uneven patterns of class formation. Therefore, a race discourse articulates something about economic and political relations on the local level. Varying forms of solidarity signify the possibility of building alliances, recognizing points of sameness within a multiplicity of possible locations. Thus space becomes a critical factor in the recognition of difference, sameness and the changing positions that these locations signify at various times, in various spatial or social locations. While the cultural tide has drifted away from the notion of racial kinship there still exists the desire to define, in a distinct way, Blackness. The idea that some essential form of Blackness or race exists is still a powerful ideology despite a long and enduring war against racial colonization. In fact, we are perhaps searching for new language or new territory from which to speak about racial identification. We cannot refuse race as a critical category as this would do nothing to undermine racisms, however, we can attempt to construct new interpretations, new

meanings that reject essentialist interpretations of race. It might be more useful to consider the dynamics of anti-essentialist interpretations of race that don't entirely dismiss some notion of essentialist configurations of race and racial cultures while acknowledging some notion of accountability in its commitment to democracy. Paul Gilroy acknowledges that to: 'set the cultivation of affinity alongside the mechanics of identity' and 'understanding the radical contingency of racial identities does not diminish their power'.<sup>52</sup> One could add that contingent to racial identity are both local cultural practices, historical interpretations of race and the impact of biography. Therefore Black political activity or imperatives and more distinct cultural forms come together to form a legitimate and weighted impact on social relations. This understanding of the interconnectedness of Black cultural forms and political activity and the way they inform the construction of racial identity, particularly in a local sense, demands a more imaginative perspective in understanding and interpreting Black culture. Spatial interpretation of identity, both metaphorically and geographically, similarly demands a more imaginative approach to reading political identity and its associated structural frameworks and social relations.

Mapping the contours of the history of racist ideologies and the discursive fields in which they operate functions as an integral part of studying the politics of race. Also integral to this process is recognizing the history of social groups that are both subordinate and dominant, and who refer to themselves in terms of race. Equally important is recognizing the complex relationship between the management of conquest and superiority myths and realities with the negotiation of consent and the spatial interplays that allow

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Gilroy, 1993, p.14.

these reciprocal interrelations to take place. This complex set of relationships informs our understanding of how economic, political and cultural factors all play a determining role in shaping the character of race. Races are imagined in the way that Anderson referred to Imagined Communities. They are politically and socially constructed and contingent upon these processes. Therefore, race politics is constructed upon a contingent set of social relations based on domination and subordination which could not exist without one another in the first instance and, in the second instance, these ideas about race articulate political and economic relations in a particular society which reach beyond the interests of a particular racial group and represent a wider identity or a series of negotiated identities locally and on a larger scale. Stuart Hall states 'Racism is always historically specific. Though it may draw on the cultural traces deposited by previous historical phases, it always takes on specific forms. It arises out of the present – not past – conditions, its effects are specific to the present organisation of society, to the present unfolding of its dynamic political and cultural processes – not simply to its repressed past'.<sup>53</sup> He refers to the plurality of ways in which racism is developed, both between societies and within them. This allows us to dismiss a single ahistorical racism and deal with or understand racism as fluid and as having an inherent instability within racial categories.

The process of changing the space around us is about changing the way we think politically, how to change the way we think about race without erasing historical influences and circumstance. What is particular about British racism

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<sup>53</sup> Stuart Hall, "Racism and Moral Panics in post-war Britain", Commission for Racial Equality, eds. , Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain, London, 1978.

is that it operates without any overt reference to race itself or biological notions of difference which really signify the term's basic meaning. Whereas the term referred more overtly to biology in the past, now it is equated with culture in a more cushioned and less overt signification. As cultural questions evolve Britons have come to pose questions concerning their national identity. This self-scrutiny has prompted a fascination with identity that has tended to veer towards the contemporary obsession with national belonging. The uncertainty around this crisis, by nature, requires that lines of inclusion and exclusion be drawn and redrawn. A nostalgia for wartime brotherhood in the face of a threatening enemy along with a homogeneous 'culture' and a long postwar period of Black immigration has diluted a national culture in theory. The analogy of war is represented not only as a response to Black immigration and settlement also of other minorities, but also as a representation of domestic political dissent and politics around crime. Blacks, amongst others, have come to represent the enemy within, perhaps not the enemy at home, for England is not their place and the space they are trying to negotiate as their own is designated as borrowed; they are always foreign, foreign in race, culture and social relations.

The culturalism of a new racism, a less overt one, leaves behind a definition of race which hierarchy for one that refers rather to matters of difference. This shift was referred to by Fanon as moving from vulgar racism to cultural racism.<sup>54</sup> Culture is conceptualized as something that is ethnically absolute, not as being fluid in character, relational, dynamic and inherently unstable. It is understood as a fixed character of a social group, not as

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<sup>54</sup> Franz Fanon, Toward the African Revolution (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1967)

something that lived out and played out. When culture then encounters race, it is transformed into something of a pseudo-biological nature pertaining to social life. Thus the result is that England's Blacks are bound by their ancestors slave history, unable (or not allowed) to be part of mainstream or alternative cultural processes.<sup>55</sup> This bond to the ancestor's land, the territory of their race also binds them to a limitless distance from civilized culture which is, of course, second nature to authentic (i.e. white) Britons. In Britain the new right ideologues embrace this position. They claim no loyalty to any theories of the superiority of whites nor any biological inferiority of Blacks. Conversely they claim a loyalty to nation rather than race and identity problems of Blacks and cultural conflict. What happens is that this cultural sense of race clouds racist issues and destroys anti-racist strategizing. A cultural sense of race upsets how we understand incarnations of racism, renders them more subtle and, equally, more pervasive. Also the notion that the complexities of racial politics can be reduced to the binary of Blacks against whites is limiting. It states that in racism there are ever only two positions, that of perpetrator or of victim stating that these complex terms can be fixed and reduced to a simple equation. Aside from the fact that this dualistic approach usurps the space in which anti-racist negotiation can take place, it also denies the possibility of the complexity and fluidity of identity. Simply put, that it is possible to be both Black and English. The notion of both/and is then a significant space in which identity is negotiated. Thus spaces and subspaces, metaphorically speaking, refer to the way in which class, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status are local, how they are local and the way that elements of this localness impact upon the

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<sup>55</sup> Paul Gilroy, 1993, p. 25.

both/and configuration of identity construction. Spaces and subspaces refer to the both/and configuration by recognizing the complexity of cultural identity, the limits of national identity and the specificity of a locally negotiated identity. Referring again to Mani and Frankenburg's text, the specificity of the subject's position depends on the relational reality at a given time, in a given space. Social location then also defines how one perceives reality. For White Britons perhaps, social location is wrapped up in myths of social superiority and, therefore, domination and creates a different and similar reality to that of a Black Briton. Home is the place of the self and the moving self is what must be negotiated. Places are presented through narratives. It's not the place, it's not the space but how you read that space. There is a local absorption of the global, which translates into everywhere having a certain set of racial meanings; there are no neutral meanings. Posing the question in what culture was that identity forged may help to inform a deeper understanding of spatially constructed identity. Recognizing that identity was forged within an enduring array of social practices that constitute identity as a pastiche of cultural subjectivity can also work to inform our understanding of identity construction. The narrative is constructed, both locally and nationally, to justify norms and practices that are then characterized as cultural. This also signifies that postcolonial migration has given way to cultural hybridity and new identities. It tells of a unified identity as a myth. In a certain way racial identity is a fiction but a necessary one for politics. In a living culture one can appreciate change in that culture and the subject of that change. It defies essentialism in a certain way, recognizing change and resemblance, something that is the same but undergoes change. Whereas South Asians describe themselves by religion



Caribbeans described themselves in terms of colour.<sup>56</sup> Ethnic identification does not always mean participating in distinctive cultural practices but is perhaps more an associational identification. Groups are so internally complex but this does not, in reality, make them mythic.

What we are addressing here is the acknowledgement of the flexibility of previously fixed boundaries concerning identity, race and other categories or categories of otherness. Mapping out identity means exploring the inner world of otherness. Redrawing the boundaries of identity means acknowledging their contingency and the contingency of the meaning we attach to them, particularly race. Difference, otherness is part of a social contract; it is about a relationship between language, power and meaning. Difference refers, perhaps symbolically, to who is allowed to speak and who is spoken about, but is not allowed to speak himself.<sup>57</sup> In the history of culture this refers not only to gender but to race. Slave culture entails a silence about one's condition and a mythology about the other's culture/race. Black is spoken about, spoken for, named and placed, robbed of any ownership of position or voice. Instead the other is made into an object of representation and objectification. The other's voice is appropriated because they are excluded, on the outside, the margins of the mainstream, the corridors of power. By standing on the outside, the other takes up its place as something which stands outside the symbolic as its negative, giving the symbolic its presence through the exclusion of the other. Blacks have been excluded socially, violently and consistently and when they have objected have

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<sup>56</sup> Tariq Modood, 1992.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Frosh, "Time, Space and Otherness," in, Pile and Thrift eds. Mapping the Subject (London: 1995), p.290.

suffered through quiet subtleties in varying approaches to racist activity, i.e. the shift to cultural racism.

In cultural, ethical and economic terms what it means to be British, ethnicity and race can be identified as a structural element. To be British, then can be identified as either anglo-centric or multi-ethnic. Clearly, the first possibility is of a homogeneous nature where history, biography, heritage and ethnic roles are fundamentally fixed, woven into the myth of Britishness and are largely the national narrative. The second idea points to a multilayered melange of histories and customs where a more heterogenous complexity exists where positions and identities cannot be assumed or taken for granted and are, therefore, not fixed but always in a state of flux, even some supposedly fundamental notion of nation. We return to the conclusion that in the construction of Britain and what it is to be British there exists ethnic implications of exclusion. Therefore, the construction of the nation or national identity as a kind of 'imagined community' it is understood that race is a political and social construction, not simply a matter of skin colour. Colour is symbolically representing a series of meanings, cultural, historical, and mythical. Cultural identity is attempting to stand up against the transgressive mark of the other present in society. This is an attempt to hold up the symbolically loaded notion of Britishness, of one of us and not one of them. The ironic conflict here is that while a negative space is ceded for the other to occupy an expectation about his place is upheld. While those who hold the legacy of the new right in Britain assume an acceptability of Black Britons embracing all that is 'British', i.e. homogeneous, that is if they act, perform, behave, eat, speak, etc. like native born britons. This, in turn, means denying

their own identity, rejecting their own space, and particular history, colonial, cultural, racial, ethnic and reflecting back a homogeneous culture.<sup>58</sup> These muted subjects of the Black diaspora and postcolonial world are required to reflect back the world of inclusion all the while remaining on the spaces of the outside to which they have relationally been assigned. In social relations Black Britons reflect back the transgression of whiteness and all of its lack and reinforce the spatial relationship of disequilibrium.

The practice of articulating time and space as marking cultural and political identities denotes their resistance to any totalizing theory. The practice of theorizing is an attempt to ground which, when we attempt to illuminate the political inevitably taps into other narrative experiences. We encounter experiences from other spaces and it is the narrative that seeks out a sequence in events that allows for a commentary, a discursive space. The dominant political narrative surrounding race in Britain is about the post-war necessary trickle of immigration which ended up producing a black sea. The narrative as part of the national myth is weaved upon specific political memory which ousts black experience and denies the reality of the Black narrative while reifying a national experience and mystifying race riots and racial conflict by, for the most part, while historical evidence exists to the contrary, laying the responsibility in the hands of loose government immigration controls. This requires some reflection as the attempt to create, with Black Britain, a narrative that follows a neat pattern of codification will meet with clear resistance. Perhaps a change in the form of narrative is required to understand more adequately Black

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<sup>58</sup> Iain Chambers, "Narratives of Nationalism" in, Carter, Donald, Squires, eds., Space and Place (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993)

experience. Black experience is perhaps beyond our grasp of comprehension if we fail to acknowledge the story that traverses the grain of the principal narrative. This would acknowledge that Black lived experience is symbolically muted in an overarching narrative form and requires a varying vision of crossing, occupying, living time and space. The Black historical narrative needs to be deconstructed in its attachment to some kind of institutional form and also needs to acknowledge the impossibility of closure or the possibility of coming full circle to complete the narrative. The narrative, in its possibility of journeying through the spaces of Black experience or of cultural identity experience must recognize the malleability of its form as it is written and rewritten all the while acknowledging history. While there may be no essence to the space of Black narratives, that they are contingent, nonetheless does not dismiss any profound historical imprint they have had. Our current conception of Black cultural and political identities, however, imprinted on the social imaginary, are the time-space mappings of 300 years of enslavement along with the division of civilized Europe from savage and exotic Africa or that which is not Europe. It would appear that current articulations of north/south, first world, third world discourses effectively reinforce these images. References to people without history, high culture, and the dismissive and subordinate nature of terms such as native reiterate a dismissive attitude towards Black space. However, resistance occurring in theoretical spaces is manifest in Black critical thinking which expresses a sincere doubtfulness with regards to Eurocentrism and the grand narrative.<sup>59</sup> In addition there is a problematization of the way we

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<sup>59</sup> Barnor Hesse, "Black to Front and Black Again", in Keith and Pile, eds., Place and the Politics of Identity, (London: Routledge, 1991) p.166.

understand space and time and history, geography, simultaneity, event and location and the particular local and time in which we live. Therefore, context is primordial in informing the discourse of politics in spatialized and temporalized Black presence in Britain today. In Black cultural theory there is a process of autobiographical expression which goes beyond displacement and relocation and which illustrates the multiple ways in which Black experience merges with everyday racialized experiences as previously mentioned with reference to Cornell West and bell hooks. This entails a kind of journey to see what has been left behind and then a journey to reconstruct the world based on what the remains signify. By recognizing that the African diaspora is a social imaginary we are able to go beyond the binary of us and the others and move into a space which explores the shifting form of Black political space.

Racialized identity pre-establishes notions of place and space generally and specifically on a scale which places hegemony in a pivotal mode. Race is inherently contradictory in its ability to be present, seemingly absolute and yet entirely a construction established as part of the structure of hegemony. As is clear in the Black British experience whether the categories of race are empty or not does not mean that there are no real lived consequences of these categories, but clearly that the fluidity of these meanings can be reversed as part of a radical reappropriation of these necessary categories. Race is always already present and thus has meanings already branded onto it but can be subverted and reordered, in particular in local resistance and depending of local meaning structures and history. By examining the locality of hegemony and hegemonic structures in contemporary social relations as they are signified in structure and in discourse can shed light on these processes. By differentiating between

two dimensions of hegemony which Howard Winant labels structural and significant it is possible that hegemony must give voice to its opposition in order to operate, however, it is the givenness of the voice that becomes pivotal in this context.<sup>60</sup> Is the voice given with already structures discourses or are the discourses constructed and articulated as part of the process of spatial resistance? An effective relation of power must construct its own subjects and an effective counter-hegemony subverts those subjectivities by disrupting them and reinterpreting the seemingly unified identities given to them. Where we are born into a world of already interpreted meanings as Heidegger attests to, these meanings are what locate us spatially and relationally.<sup>61</sup> However, the process of subverting these meanings, of resisting them, is the process of reinscribing spaces with new meanings, changing or reinterpreting the metanarratives about race. The world into which we are socialized is the one from which we take our meanings, which brands our identities onto us. However, where race specific characteristics are taken from biological phenomena, there is no basis for distinction based on racial lines, but rather that these are thoroughly contingent spatial temporal categories which allow for a reformulation of these categories. The imprint of racial signifiers on the social and political have a new discourse, that is the discourse of difference.

We can speak of racial formation as a process precisely because of the inherently capricious nature of racial categories which forces their continuous rearticulation and reformation – their social, local, spatial construction as they reflect the changing context in which they are invoked. This discourse can

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<sup>60</sup> Howard Winant, "Racial Formation and Hegemony: Global and Local Developments" in Rattansi and Westwood eds. , Racism, Modernity and Identity, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994)

<sup>61</sup> Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1962)

then be seen as an attempt not to divide but to unite differences in a way that images difference as a power to be reappropriated. Therefore, it is essential to understand that distinction between race, class and gender and their pre-existing meanings share common experience in the necessary categories of a racialized world. The spaces created around and across race, class and gender cannot be isolated as it is the intersection and perceived meaning of these forces and their play in power relations that inform these conditions. The increasingly complex relationship between race and class is more accurately about the duality (and its limits) of exclusion and inclusion. The sites of resistance are about exploding categories and embracing new ways of understanding the complex politics of racial identity. There are, therefore, 'other' ways of conceptualizing the plurality of race and new spaces in which to articulate it. The notion of other voices which occupy time and space can displace the dominant paradigm. The dominant discourses can be rendered second order by the opening up of discursive space for the voice or voices of the other. Referring again to hooks and Cornell new spaces of racial self-consciousness also demand their own self-reflexivity to ensure that power does not take hold with one discourse. The notion that the meaning of race pervades social life means that not only does it effect the individual psyche and relationships among individuals but also in collective identities and all of these meanings are present in all social relations.

Social relations are socially constituted; identities and social signification systems are subject to this fluid, contested and flexible terrain of social meanings which means that spaces and subspaces, which are racially and, therefore politically inscribed, are an integral part of all social relations. There

is some level level of racially organized subjection and objectification complete with historical, contextual and temporal racial signification fueling social relations and simultaneously contributing to the very present and local shaping of racial signification. The shaping of racialized space is a signified and symbolized through reference to the geography of race and the bewildering variety of racialized experiences, identities and social structures. The dynamics of racial signification are necessarily relational. How much racial identities have autonomy in their construction is relative to the structural implications and this is as very much a political question. In Britain the national popular culture and history have occupied pivotal space in the constitution of Black British identity.



## Conclusion

Recently the acknowledgement that the social is spatially constructed has had a profound impact on our understanding of the spatial organization of the political and the construction of political identity in particular. Because spatial terminology is so frequently left unexamined, the meanings are not initially evident. Over the last 30 years the idea that space is a social construct has been accepted but this conception has been unidimensional in that it implies that geographical outcomes and forms are simply results of social process. It is the notion of simultaneity which creates the subspaces and the posturing of these subspaces in a network of relations from the local all the way through to the global. Clearly globalization and the ensuing migration has had an enormous impact on spatialized identity formation. Mani and Frankenburg have illustrated the spatial dimension of power relations in identity construction as it occurs in social relations. One aspect of migration that changes landscape is the fusion of cultures that takes place over time. Here we see how space and place are both influenced by the mills of migration as they affect and politicize identity as well as changing landscapes in the urban. The impact of migration on the politics of location has also been monumental. The notion of a national identity and its myths within a specific nation is sustained through the exclusivity of these myths and their imaginary attachments. In liberal-democracy inclusion is promoted as a part of the national story as well as integration which neglects the lived experience of exclusions of race, class and gender. In a world which is marked by the patterns of migration ethnicity and the narratives of the transmigrant mark national stories be it officially or

unofficially, literally or figuratively. The geographies of social relations are constantly being rewritten through the relations of migrant cultural histories and a kind of cultural syncretism. At the same time, a kind of interpretation of the other takes place through the prism of a kind of home and other binary. As Mani pointed out, within the walls of the university she was interpreted and placed in the space of the other and, as such, in this situation, less than or as occupying a less valuable space. Whether national or local politics accounts for these aberrations in the national myths it does not eradicate this complex and highly influential set of social relations. Clearly the patterns of identity construction are subject to the influences of a spatialized politics and these spaces are localized even in the geoculture of a world system. The contradictions of liberalism are manifest in the context of global culture. The postcolonial world of a geocultural world system moves the context of psychic colonialism but does not dismiss it.

The complexity of the spatialized social relations is exemplified by the experience of the ethnic in the diaspora. While Jews originated the notion of diaspora, being a homeless ethnicity for several millennia, today the concept of diaspora is rich in ethnicities, fragmentation, commonalities and differences. Britain, in recent history, has been the site of a highly complex set of social relations as colliding cultures and a colonial history have provided a fertile ground for ethnic conflict. In liberal society, two assumptions underpin relations between immigrants and the larger society. The society expects its immigrants to identify with it and in return grants its immigrants equal rights and treats them equally as with any citizen. These seem to be reasonable concepts in a fair and cohesive society and represent the core of liberal values.

However, much depends on the interpretation of identification and equality. A political community is a historical entity with formal and informal ties that bind it together. In expecting their immigrants to identify with it and feel attached to the community, a moral and emotional commitment becomes integral to the cohesion of the society. Without this, social relations will be strained and members may not care to live together. Identification does not necessarily mean assimilation into a society. One can develop a common sense of belonging without having to become the same as the rest. Assimilation, which demands an unacceptable 'membership fee', provokes resentment and hinders identification. Integration, conversely, is a social concept, which implies immigrants should not live isolated and should be implicated in the wider society. However, integration can take place at many levels, and to some degree, may take place only at certain levels. Thus the notion of full integration is perhaps not sustainable and in this sense, politically and socially, integration is both impossible and undesirable. In addition, in a multicultural society, the notion of equality hinges on the elimination of discrimination and disadvantage also in order to develop a sense of common belonging. The notion of being both Black and English becomes a sort of lived contradiction putting identity in conflict with itself. The notion of the spatialized identity then is both against itself and also the force of resistance, as Paul Gilroy refers to it 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at,'<sup>62</sup>.

Tracing the history of racial politics in Britain means mapping the changing contours of racist ideology, evident both in public policy and the public mind, as well as the history of social groups both dominant and

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<sup>62</sup> Paul Gilroy, 1991, p.120.

subordinate and how they have lived their race and acted accordingly. Clearly the groups we know are not wholly formed through the power of racial discourse. The intimate association between ideas about race and the practices of slavery and slavery's grandchildren and the adoption and absorption of the place of race and each race's place are very complex. There is a dimension to a spatialized conception of political identity which is substantially emancipatory. Space offers a plurality of opportunity politically which in turn offers empowerment in a politicized conception of identity construction. The notion of sites of struggle and cognitive mapping make not only empowerment possible but a radical understanding of the powerful role the discourse of space and place impart to race, identity and their place in the world. Biography is the narrative based on location. Identities are not fixed in space but are looking for, finding both a particular or many spaces from which to speak. They are looking to ground experience and identity in an attempt to negotiate a political place in a complex and fluid world of social relations. In this very postmodern of worlds, postcolonial of worlds everything is always in process. bell hooks and Cornell West, both African-American philosophers, write about the need to embrace a liberating identity politics. They also both discuss that this politics must recognize a relational subject location, that the subject is not fixed to one particular category but is located in many places, many groups and it is this recognition that renders the political liberatory. hooks and West both refer to an emancipatory politics for African-Americans but that which can be translated also from an intellectual discourse into the everyday. This kind of emancipatory politics then is possible for a collective action which can recognize the impact of discursive spaces as relative, both embedded with social and

political relations as well as being always in the process of change. That geography, spaces and subspaces are postured, locally, as they refer to the subject, as they refer to class, race, gender and even globally. Space is not fixed, it is subject to negotiation and renegotiation. Identity and particularly racial identity are contingent, lacking any essential order, but this does not diminish their possible power. Within the framework of highly complex social relations, identity is relational, subject to spatial relations and the highly contingent and very powerful meanings which locate them politically. Space and place, position and location, are both strategic and integral to social processes and cannot be separated from localized meaning systems as they point to specific layers of a social context. The discourses of space and place are always already political; like Black space the meanings can be subverted or reappropriated.

As Paul Gilroy points out, the framework of race, how we understand race is based upon historical forces of civilization which have laid out a map of race based upon racial terror.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless he calls for oppositional democratic agency even in the most restricted circumstances. Even from within an already mapped understanding of race and racial politics that a new framework from within can be weaved and black cultural expression can take place in a democratic position.

Clearly space is a useful and essential tool for analysis. It is important to review analysis through a spatial prism if we want to achieve a thorough and multi-layered understanding of politics and, in particular, the dynamics of racial politics and the many facets of a politics of location. Space is a very important

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p.9.

variable which allows for a deconstruction of essentialized categories and also allows for a multi-faceted understanding of identity construction and the construction of otherness and the complexity of those relationships that influence these categories. Space allows us to understand the contingency of identity, the relational structure of political identity, that identity is built in relation to others. Identity changes depending on the location of the subject, stating that class is a large factor in the determination of location and that race and culture can be classed and play a major role in locating and negotiating space. A classed or racialized society means that spaces are dominated by social relations characterized by conflict and coercion, by domination and submission, by tension and resistance. Many spaces can be active at any given time and these spaces are fluid, shifting. The posturing of these spaces and subspaces takes place all the time and it is the variability of these shifting and fluid spaces that allows for a constant negotiation and renegotiation of location. The space that becomes dominant depends on location, through class, race, gender, etc. Black spaces are marked both by history and by local context. The power of spatial relations in race enables us to understand and analyse the profound impact that location has on identity construction. Black Britons' identity formation is constructed around existing spatial meanings and around spaces that are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. The process of identity construction is always in process, is contingent on spaces and subspaces and how they are postured. Therefore, context is primordial in informing Black political discourse.

The relationship between race and space is invariably a fundamental factor in political analysis. Race is an important factor in understanding the

variable space of otherness. Spaces are imbued with meaning according to who occupies them. Race and its meanings are a fundamental factor in determining the meanings of spaces. Different races are perceived differently and spaces are imposed according to race. Varying degrees of otherness are conferred from the outside or the mainstream 'us and the others' and this is not the same across the different races. There is a hierarchy of relationships, a classing of races that confers space and their associated meanings. Here it is essential to refer to the impact ideology has had on the space of otherness. The state ideological apparatus has had a profound impact on the constitution of 'other' spaces. Racialized policy and racist state apparatus have created spaces for resistance. The process of creating marginal spaces for Blacks via public policy has the effect of also creating sites of resistance. Policy and the ideologies fueling policy have had a great deal of impact also on how that resistance will take place. While there is no essential concept of race, there is neither an essential concept of space. Ideology exists, is affirmed, in as much as it reflects an adequate part of reality. Ideology and the ideology of race and the space it occupies has such an extensive power because it reflects enough of reality to become very persuasive. Because ideological statements and the spaces they occupy are partially true they cannot be rejected as being utterly false. They must rather be understood in terms of the way that they mystify reality by misrepresenting it or representing reality only in part and obscuring the spatial aspect of social relations and its power. The coding of space into categories of which are defined as us and other marks those spaces with distinctive otherness in a biological and historical necessity which is defined as inescapable. The logic of identity constructs totalizing systems that seek to reduce all categories under one

unifying principle. This represents the power of ideology and the way in which ideology fuels policy and reinforces the logic of raced spaces. That preferred spaces give life to ideology, race and its meanings, is a reflection of power relations in society and their impact on daily life and the way people are dealt with administratively and socially. There exists a contingency in the meaning of race; race is contingent upon history, slavery, relationships of domination and subordination and issues of power and all of these relations effect how race is understood and how these meanings are embedded in social relations, in policy and in state apparatus. Equally space has no essential meaning, meaning is given or imposed from the outside by embedded power relations which set up a relational reality and a plurality of specificities of subject position. The relational meaning of space is such that it is wholly contingent on the varying spaces and subspaces that recognize the complexity of cultural identity, the limits of national identity and the specificity of a locally negotiated identity. The notion that subject position can refer to multiple sites of location, that spaces are both relational and variable and refer to a multiplicity of meanings de-essentializes space and reinforces the similarity between hierarchy in race and hierarchy in space.

Race and space also work to reinvent themselves. The reinvention of collective identities both de-essentializes identity and creates another other. Space has symbolic meaning which has the power to transform itself. The reification of meanings attached to spaces may be imposed by subjects or ideologies outside the spaces, occupying different spaces or social locations vis a vis these spaces, and have the power to demonize them. However, a counter appropriation of meanings for the subjects of these spaces is possible and



signify a shift in the politicization of race. Relations then shift according to the appropriation of meanings of a given space. Spaces can be reclaimed as sites of resistance and made to shift in the contingent balance of social relations. A politics of difference and Black political discourse, both in theory and in the mainstream, have allowed the oppressed to reappropriate racialized meanings in racialized social discourse. As class, race and gendered identities share pre-existing meanings and common experience in necessary categories they cannot be isolated in their difference and as their spaces intersect. These increasingly complex relationships are about the contestation of the social order and radical democratic movements offer new interpretations of race and culture. Black discourse moves towards a renewed otherness with reappropriated meanings and categories. They are moving towards the deconstruction of foundations towards an inclusive discourse and the opening up of new spaces and subverting colonial discourse. There are, therefore, other ways of conceptualizing the plurality of race. The notion of other voices or a plurality of voices or spaces displaces the dominant paradigm. By opening up new spaces in Black cultural theory there is a process of autobiographical expression which goes beyond displacement and relocation and which illustrates the multiple ways in which Black experience merges with everyday racialized experiences as previously mentioned with reference to Cornell West and bell hooks. This postcolonial space becomes a new space from which to celebrate difference. This entails a kind of journey to see what has been left behind and then a journey to reconstruct the world based on what the remains signify. By recognizing that the African diaspora is a social imaginary it is possible to go beyond the binary of us and the others and move into a space which explores

the shifting form of Black political space. Space and place, position and location are strategic to social processes and cannot be separated from local meaning systems as they refer to specific layers of a social context. The discourses of space are already politicized; like Black space the meanings can be subverted or reappropriated.

I have attempted to demonstrate here that space is an essential tool in understanding the construction of political identity and how the metaphors of geography are integral to the relational way that identity is constructed. By examining the discourses of race, Black British experience in particular, and the way that Black British identity has been constituted, imposed, negotiated and now, renegotiated, the discourses of space and location are critical and strategic in both understanding embedded meaning in social relations and also as a means to subverting or reappropriating spaces and their meanings.

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