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## On *biocoloniality* and 'respectability' in contemporary London

### Abstract

This essay is framed by discussions on the civil unrest in British cities in 2011, the politics of austerity, the mass unemployment of the young, 'the war on terror' and 'radicalisation' and the vulnerability of the poor and 'unrespectable'. It advances a concept of *biocoloniality* and explores 'respectability', class and transnational postcolonial urban cultures in contemporary London. The essay argues for a theorisation which can account for how a divided subject *produces* the *effect* of an undivided and self-governing 'core self' who 'possesses' distinguishing 'biological' 'capacities', 'psychological' attributes' and cultural 'characteristics'. It considers how this is accomplished through our daily practical activity such as our 'imaginable', 'possible' sexual desires, everyday practices of reflection, our bodily demeanour and bodily significations. This concept of biocoloniality is composed of two theoretical strands. In 'on inscription and creolisation' and in dialogue with a single respondent on 'respectability' and 'beauty', I entwine disparate theoretical threads from work on biopolitics and governmentality, racialisation, psychoanalysis and postcoloniality and performativity, sexualisation and intersectionality together. I forward a formulation of *inscription* that can reveal how we inscribe and sculpt our own *and* other bodies with different 'capacities' and 'qualities'. I then tie strands of work on repetition together and advance a theorisation of *reiteration*. I consider how we struggle with, overcome and are defeated by ourselves as we reinscribe our own *and* other bodies. The essay thus considers how it is through in part our daily biocolonial practice that different bodies that are closer to and more distant from notions of the human, the un/respectable,

un/desirable, ab/normal, ir/replaceable and expendable come into being and how this unsettles clear distinctions between coloniality and postcoloniality.

**Keywords**

• biocoloniality • racialisation • inscription • creolisation • reiteration • respectability • beauty • postcoloniality •

## **On *biocoloniality* and ‘respectability’ in contemporary London**

### **Introduction**

‘I suggest that we strive to find a different path from the familiar ones that lead respectively to the resoluteness of therapeutic essentialism and the squeamishness of anti-essentialisms which are complacent about the continuing effects of racism.’

Paul Gilroy (1993a, p14)

‘Respectability seems securely enthroned, however new her garments, permitting some latitude of sexual expression provided that it does not endanger her power and dominance.’

George Mosse (1985, p191)

‘It really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much.’

Arundhati Roy (1997, p33)

‘A political economy of mass dispossession, of predatory practices . . . particularly of the poor and the vulnerable, the unsophisticated and the legally unprotected has become the order of the day.’

David Harvey (2011)

This essay is framed by discussions on the civil unrest in British cities in 2011, on policing, the politics of austerity, the mass unemployment of the young and the vulnerability of the poor and ‘unrespectable’. It advances a concept of *biocoloniality* and explores ‘respectability’, class and transnational postcolonial urban cultures in

contemporary London. There has been a proliferation of anti-essentialist theorisations of cultural identity which emphasise multiplicity, unpredictability, fluidity and fragmentation. They have emerged in response to essentialist formulations which insist that our daily practical activity stems from 'innate' 'biological' 'capacities', 'psychological' 'traits' or 'cultural values' considered to be specific to each fairly homogeneous 'culture' or 'community.' This essay draws from and builds upon 'anti-essentialist' understandings of liquid, endlessly travelling, tumbling and unravelling cultural identities. It further argues however for a divided and discordant subject who collides and struggles with themselves as they repeat *and* rewrite their daily practice. The essay is also informed by discussions on 'the war on terror' and 'radicalisation', the re-emergence of the far right in the U.K and across Europe, contemporary possibilities of political community and 'how different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands' (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 76). It advances a concept of *biocoloniality* which can accommodate how a divided subject *produces* the *effect* of an individual, undivided, self-governing and *essential* 'core self' who 'possesses' distinguishing 'biological' 'capacities', 'psychological' attributes', cultural 'characteristics' and 'particular' political concerns. It considers how this is accomplished through our daily practical activity such as our 'imaginable', 'possible' sexual desires, everyday practices of reflection, our bodily demeanour and bodily significations. In dialogue with the words of a respondent which revolve around 'respectability' and 'beauty' and my ethnographic observations of her practice, the essay argues for 'an anti-anti-essentialism that sees racialised subjectivity as the product of social practices that supposedly derive from it' (Gilroy 1993: 102).

The concept of biocoloniality is composed of two theoretical strands namely 'inscription and creolisation' and 'revolution and reiteration.' In the first part of the essay, 'on inscription and creolisation', I draw from and entwine different theoretical threads from work on biopolitics and governmentality (Agamben 1999, Foucault 1986, 1988, 2001, Rose 1996), racialisation, psychoanalysis and postcoloniality (Fanon 1986, Frosh 2013, Gilroy 1993, Hall 2002, Sartre 1995, Roseneil 2013), , sexualisation (De Beauvoir 1989, McNay 1992, Probyn 1993), performativity (Butler 1988, 1997, 2004) and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991, Brah and Phoenix 2004) together. In dialogue with my interpretations of the 'ordinary', 'unremarkable' daily practice and words of a respondent on 'respectability' and 'beauty' (Besson 1993, Gilman 2000, McClintock 1995, Mosse 1985, Skeggs 2011, Stallybrass and White 1986), I advance a theorisation of *inscription* that can account for how we *ascribe* or *distribute* different 'biological' 'capabilities', 'psychological' 'traits', cultural 'characteristics' and 'values' to ourselves *and* others simultaneously. I then advance a theorisation of *creolisation* which reflects how we *creolise* or *hybridise* these numerous, potentially antagonistic prescriptions and prohibitions that we encounter in the daily practical acts of others. I consider how we remake *and* replicate different notions of 'psychological' 'traits', 'biological' 'capabilities' and 'cultural' characteristics' through our daily practice of crafting our own *and* other bodies. I explore how it is through in part our ordinary, unremarkable daily practical activity that 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' bodies, ideas of distinct 'biological types', and 'populations' from less or more 'developed cultures' that are more remote from or closer to the ideal of 'the human' come into existence and how this disturbs clear divisions between coloniality and postcoloniality. In the second part of the essay 'on revolution and reiteration', I draw from and entwine disparate theoretical strands of work on repetition (Butler 1988, Deleuze 1994, Freud 1958, Hall 2002) and advance a

theorisation of *reiteration*. I consider how we confront and wrangle with, subdue and overpower ourselves *as* we attempt to both reinscribe our own *and* other bodies and conserve *and* remake our daily bodily practice.

The essay begins from the premise that all ethnographic observation and description is selective and interpretative, that ethnographic writing is always imaginative and inventive as opposed to transparent, factual and objective and that all ethnographic practices are inseparable from institutional constraints (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and disciplinary traditions and conventions. This ethnographic representation is not a clear, panoramic view of an undivided, autonomous individual but an analysis of the particular words and practices of a divided and discordant subject whose interpretations of her own practice are both shifting and contradictory.

I conducted interviews to draw information on the respondent's own interpretations and to consider the disjunctures between her practice and her understanding of her practice. I also drew from the silences, hesitations, and contradictions in her narrative which are as significant as the material that is clearly discussed. Informed by the mode of representing complete yet edited interview transcripts employed by Bourdieu (1999) and the method of portraiture advanced by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), I have presented the interview transcript in the form of block quotations. This form of representation is employed to locate sentences and paragraphs within the context of a wider conversation between respondent and researcher, to illuminate connections, ruptures, continuities and inconsistencies and to convey a multidimensional and more detailed, ethnographic portrait of the respondent. This representation is a co-production, 'the product of an encounter' (Alleyne 2002: 11). The analysis is provisional,

incomplete and partial yet rigorous, admissible and informative (Back 2007, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Rosaldo 1993).

## **Jade**

Jade is the third of four children. Her father is a journalist and she describes her mother as 'a homemaker'. They live in Kingston, Jamaica close to their other children in one of the city's wealthier yet less conspicuously patrolled residential neighbourhoods. Jade's parents are firmly located through the schools and universities they attended in Jamaica and the U.K, through friendship and marriage, the organisations and institutions they work for and residency in their particular neighbourhood within the Jamaican upper middle classes. These classes are constituted in part by descendants of the Jamaican plantocracy who occupy prominent positions in banking and finance and who are inseparable from the British upper classes and upper middle managerial and professional classes. In several informal discussions with Jade and her friend Karim however, both respondents discussed how her family had followed multiple international and local routes to and through Jamaica although their narratives were notably inconsistent and contradictory. They referred to different branches of her family such as those who came to Jamaica from England as Baptist missionaries, others she describes as Amerindian and African whose histories she markedly did not know of and others who were brought to Jamaica from China to provide services and goods on plantations who Jade was once careful to distinguish from Chinese indentured labourers. Jade thus describes a family who once occupied different class positions in relation to the colonial administration and the white plantocracy. The missionaries she refers to worked with British administrators in schools on combined educational and



religious projects yet were firmly located outside the social domains of the plantation owners. The service providers on plantations similarly occupied different class positions to indentured labourers yet they were also the subjects of these particular 'civilising projects' (Mintz 1996). Jade now however emphasises significant differences between her own and other families from the same and similar neighbourhoods in Kingston. She illuminates the different historical routes they travelled and differences in influence and affluence that may be unnoticeable to those outside these discretely guarded communities. Jade's description of her family reflects Caribbean histories of 'ethnic layering' (Mintz 1996) on plantations, different classes within European colonial classes (Bourdieu 1999, Hobsbawm 1987) and different classes and opposing political positions within families and communities in both Jamaica and Britain.

Jade moved to the U.K to study at the University of Sussex in Brighton before moving to Islington in North London and working for an international NGO. She then returned to Kingston and worked for a sister organisation where she met her husband again with whom she has a son. They separated in 2008 and Jade relocated back to London. She now lives in Dalston in East London and works for a small local charity near her home. I interviewed her at her home in Islington in September 2002 and again at her new home in Dalston in October 2011 where she lives with her son Calvin. Shortly after I arrive, Jade tells me that the civil unrest in August 2011 has given rise to public discussions which have begun to address the smouldering divisions between young working-class residents and older, predominantly white middle-class professionals who have moved to the neighbourhood in recent years. She states that she is hopeful about the political possibilities there may be following the 'London riots' as she insists that 'a younger generation have found their voice' and that local histories of economic inequality and

rising concerns around the gentrification of the area can no longer be ignored. The transcript below is extracted from the interview conducted in October 2011 yet my analysis is also informed by an earlier interview in 2002, by several informal conversations with Jade in 2002 and 2003 and ethnographic observation during this period. She was thirty-six at the time of the second interview. Jade was informally dressed in dark blue cut-off jeans and a black vest on this unusually warm October afternoon. Our interview was intermittently interrupted by phone calls, her young son returning home, a brief visit from her friend Karim and a short walk to a shop nearby which all contributed to an informal and comfortable atmosphere. Jade was warm, welcoming and unassuming yet when I interviewed her in 2002, she had been more distant, formal and cautious. She spoke clearly and confidently yet would sometimes fall silent in mid-sentence only to begin speaking easily once more. Her accent was unsurprisingly fluid moving seamlessly from, to borrow her words 'Upper class Kingston' to 'middle-class London' to 'ordinary black London'. Jade stated:

**J:** I grew up in Kingston, Jamaica. With Karim . . .

He told me that he said to you 'I am Portuguese, Indian, African, Irish, Chinese, Syrian' and that in Jamaica, in Kingston, that makes him 'a white man'. . . Yeah well it's also because his family have *a lot* of money. . . I mean, we do too [*added awkwardly*] but not like them. . . [*pause*]

**Y:** Remind me, did you both move to the U.K around the same time?

**J:** Yeah, I came here to go to university and Karim went to medical school. I stayed here for a few years afterwards, moved back home. . . Came back again . . . in 2008. That's when I moved here [to Dalston] and [when] I started working for the charity I work for now. . . [*pause*]. . . I like living here. I feel at home here. Less conspicuous. Less out of place . . . And I like working for them. They're more. . . I don't know, more . . . hmmm . . . down to earth. And there's less of a distance between the people who work there and the people they're working with. And it's more mixed there. The organisations I worked for in London and Kingston before were *entirely white*. And

politically, where I'm working now is far more . . . hmmm . . . progressive. . . I'm definitely happier there. . .

**Y:** When I ran into you in Brixton and when we spoke on the phone, you mentioned how so much had changed since we last met or since our last interview which was some years ago now.

**J:** Yes. Everything has changed. And I feel quite different. . . I don't know. I see things quite differently now. . .

**Y:** In what way?

**J:** . . . When I was growing up, when I was a teenager, I wasn't interested in politics. I was more kind of conservative, more traditional. Like my mother. But my aunts – [her mother's younger sisters] – and my father, brothers and sister they're far more liberal. They were always talking about racism and poverty . . . and corruption and crime in Jamaica. And in the U.K. . . And they moved in other circles, more political circles . . . I didn't really understand their anger and frustration with our family or our friends. . . [pause]

They were frustrated with what they saw as their silence. But now I think 'why would they have criticised or turned against a system which so clearly benefited them'? But then they [her father, aunts, brothers and sister] were very critical and they were, are just as privileged. . .

I used to think 'but this isn't our fight'. I didn't understand how this related to me *at all*. I heard the same arguments when I went to university. . .

**Y:** At Sussex?

**J:** Yeah, when I met other young people who were very outspoken about racism and policing . . . and the curriculum. They would ask me why I *wasn't* concerned. They insisted that this was *my* struggle. I wasn't even a part of the black student groups. I just wasn't interested. . .

I wanted to focus on my studies – because I wanted to work for an NGO so I needed to get a first. . . And I wanted to work in London or Kingston and get married and have children which is what I did. I wanted a family and a beautiful home. But everybody wants this, right? Everyone goes to college, gets married and has children, don't they? Yeah well that's what I thought back then. Now I see things differently . . .

I had known Mark since I was at school but not too too well. Our families had always known each other although my father was very critical of a development his family had been involved in.

**Y:** What kind of development?

**J:** [With uncertainty]. . . some kind of tourist development I think . . . . But when we started dating, he [her father] was happy for me. Because I had been so miserable. I mean, I thought that I'd meet the man I was going to marry at Sussex. But he didn't want to get married which I didn't understand at the time. I thought that he didn't want to marry *me*. I was so worried that I was never going to meet anyone. I was twenty-four [*laughs*]. . . [Long pause] So we had the beautiful wedding that I wanted. In Kingston. . . . And I carried on working until a few months before Calvin was born. . . . So everything was in place. I didn't think *twice* about giving up my job. . . . But it was really hard [long pause] . . . . I found being a wife and a mother really hard. . . . At first I felt really sheltered being at home with my baby. It's where I wanted to be. . . . But then I felt really isolated. . . . I was exhausted all the time. . . . And I found it hard to lose the weight I had gained during pregnancy. . . . I had a lot of problems with my health. And I missed my friends. Like Karim. And studying and working and travelling. And Mark and I hardly saw each other. My brothers and sister told me to go back to work. But it was about more than that. . . . I didn't want to live *like this*. I didn't want to live with Mark in this huge house. I never saw anyone. . . . Everybody tells me that marriage is hard especially for the first few years. First few years! Seriously? . . . I didn't want to be married anymore. I wanted to leave but I didn't want to leave. Because you know . . . [awkwardly] there's a stigma about being single. And I'd never been single before. I didn't know if I could do this by myself. And did I really want to be a single mother? I wanted to be a wife and a mother. This is *all I'd wanted* since I was a child. I wanted a beautiful home. I wanted a good life. Who doesn't? . . . I wanted to go out to restaurants and resorts with Mark. I wanted to travel. To Europe and India and Vietnam. . . .

All I thought about - apart from Calvin [her son] - was losing weight, the house and Mark, his friends and their partners. I didn't have *any* friends who weren't Mark's friends. I didn't go anywhere without him. . . . It's like I lost everything.

**Y:** Like you lost everything? . . . What do you mean?

**J:** I don't know. . . . I didn't have anything left. I didn't know what I thought or wanted anymore. . . . Living like this was exhausting. Being so preoccupied with the way you look *is exhausting*. And it's not good for you. Because you never quite get there, you know. . . . I mean, I never lost the weight I wanted to lose. I was *terrified* of getting older. It's *so* time consuming. . . . I wasn't very

happy. So we separated in 2008 and Calv and I moved here. He misses his father but he's ok. He still sees him several times a year when we go home or when he comes here. . .

**Y:** How did your family and friends respond to your decision to leave?

**J:** My mother didn't want me to leave. She still doesn't understand why I left a man like Mark. Because he's so gentle. She thinks that I had everything. And that I've taken Calv away from his father. But I'm not her. I don't want what she wants. . . My dad and my brothers and my sister are happy for me. They know I've done the right thing. . .'

### **On inscription and creolisation**

Jade recalls encountering numerous recurring, irregular and conflicting normative demands embedded in the words and other practical acts of others. The discursive norms that she responds to are rooted in directives on 'proper' and 'appropriate' 'conduct' and 'suitable' and implicitly 'unsuitable' friends, partners, schools, universities, places to work and neighbourhoods to live. She describes how these normative directives are conveyed through the sudden, unguarded surprise of others, their open disapproval or by a simple silent absence of approval. The cultural demands that she is confronted with rest upon unquestioned if not unthought ideas of what she *and* others 'could' and 'should' be and what she and others could not 'imaginably' 'be' and 'must not' become. She inscribes and carves herself *and* others with different 'biological' 'capacities', 'psychological' 'traits' and 'cultural' 'characteristics' *as* she responds to the discursive directives embedded in the words and other practical acts of others.

Jade describes her father, sister, brothers and aunts as insistently critical of the postcolonial Jamaican and British upper and upper-middle classes. She refers to their

refusal to be silent about racism, poverty and political corruption in both Kingston and London as she describes her mother and herself as relatively more 'conservative' and 'traditional'. Based on other discussions with Jade and my own observations of different members of her family however, her mother appears to quietly admire what they collectively describe as the outspokenness of her husband, sisters and children. She seems to be as awkwardly and uncomfortably embedded in the same social worlds that they are yet is notably far more apprehensive about what she describes as the potential personal costs of their political candour. There is a clear correspondence between what they all describe as their uncompromising political outspokenness and her sometimes profound concern for them all. Their carefreeness rests upon her continuous fear for their safety which is repeatedly misread as simple conservatism or a longing to remain respectable. I did not however observe a fearless political outspokenness but a precise care not to participate in particular public debates nor to criticise specific public figures. Their collective insistence that they refuse to be complicit unlike Jade and her mother and their repeated description of themselves as outspoken and uncompromising sits next to numerous silences. They inscribe Jade and her mother with a conservatism, traditionalism, propriety and sexual respectability whose constraints they insist that they are free from. Their meticulousness in ensuring that their 'political outspokenness' does not destabilise their sense of security or belonging in their places of work or their neighbourhood coexists with their repeated insistence that they always 'speak out'. Jade thus responds to the discursive directives embedded in their careful choice of words which they describe as 'outspokenness', their insistence that they could not *possibly* be accused of complicity or political conservatism unlike Jade and her mother *and* their choice of residential neighbourhood, friends and partners simultaneously. She responds to the contradictory discursive demands she encounters on 'speaking out', on 'injustice',

on 'who she is' and on where and with whom it is *imaginable* to work and live, befriend and love.

Jade describes her familial home as a space where discourses on the connections between empire and the industrialisation of Britain, the development of the plantation economy, enslavement and indenture, the emergence and expansion of European corporations and the affluence of the Jamaican *and* British upper and upper middle classes freely circulate. She insists that her family illuminates rather than conceals the connections between the colonisation of the British Caribbean, the development of British cities and the formation of transnational white elites. From my observations however, they do so in ways which carefully sidestep if not obscure how the wealth of particular prominent families in both contemporary Jamaica *and* Britain has been accumulated and preserved. This has become unspeakable *and* unthinkable. Jade's narratives on the political activities and friendships of her father, her maternal aunts and her brothers and sister however simultaneously reflect the involvement of some from the white Jamaican upper classes into the Jamaican independence movement and other Caribbean nationalist movements from the late 1930s. Their political activities and friendships also illuminate their involvement in contemporary transnational anti-imperialist, anti-war and anti-racist political cultures in both Jamaica and Britain. These political spheres are in turn inseparable from the collectivities and organisations Jade describes encountering as a student. The silences within her family illuminate the heterogeneity of these political cultures as reflected in the competing discourses which circulate, incommensurable political positions within and differences in class, economic immiseration, outspokenness and political and personal vulnerability.

Jade is further confronted with the prescriptions and prohibitions embedded in the indissoluble silences of her friends from the contemporary Jamaican upper and upper middle classes. She is met with an endlessly repeated silence on the connections between wealth accumulated through the plantation economy in the Caribbean and the inherited property of the Jamaican elite *and* the white British upper and upper-middle classes. She responds to the repeated directives of her peers in Kingston and later to her Jamaican and British peers as a student and worker in Brighton and London by reproducing and defending the same silences. The refusal to discuss these connections marks her belonging inside these communities and defines their borders. She recalls her disinterest in joining student organisations or participating in political campaigns which *reconnect* the wealth of Jamaican and British elites *to* policing ‘black communities’ and the politics of the curricula in British universities. She remembers how these political discourses and political concerns became the ‘specific interests’ of ‘a minority’ that she could not *imaginably* be a part of. She states ‘I didn’t understand how this related to me *at all*.’ Jade insists that discourses on the connections between the affluence and respectability of the upper classes and the pathologisation and criminalisation of the lower classes in the Caribbean *and* the European imperial centres that had freely circulated in her familial home had become unthinkable to her. She repeatedly encountered however a refusal to consider these connections in the silences and contradictions embedded in the daily practices of her family, in their insistence that she is conservative and respectable *and* that they are not and in the endless silence of her peers. She responds to these numerous repeated and irregular directives by rendering these connections unintelligible and unthinkable. The disjuncture between the discursive directives she encounters in her familial home and her imagination of this



discursive space further illuminates the potential fractures between our political hopes and our daily practical activity and points towards a divided and discordant subject.

Jade further uncovers the labour involved in the management of her house and domestic staff and 'the labour of leisure' (Rojek 2009) demanded by the daily preparation and presentation of herself as a capable, admirable wife and mother and as a 'beautiful, desirable' woman. She recalls responding to the directives that are embedded in unquestioned and unquestionable notions of 'suitable' friends and partners, 'romantic love' and 'appropriate' forms of sexual 'conduct' such as heteronormative, monogamous sexual practice. She traces how these norms were conveyed through the certainty of others such as her mother and her peers of the same age that she would become a wife and mother. Jade recalls silently cordoning off the ideals and ambitions of marriage and motherhood as indisputable. Looking back at herself at university she remembers 'I wanted to work in London or Kingston and get married and have children which is what I did. I wanted a family and a beautiful home. But everybody wants this, right? Everyone goes to college, gets married and has children, don't they?' She also encounters these directives through observing others create and manage 'a comfortable family home', care for children and uphold these practices as the sole route to 'personal fulfilment.' These 'instructions' thread through notions of 'duty' and 'obligation' to herself which are paradoxically defined by caring for others and through living this particular imagination of 'a purposeful and contented life' which will anchor her belonging in these specific social worlds. Jade reflects how these norms rest upon the silent configuration of other 'ways of life' as shameful, abnormal, disreputable or dangerous.

Jade clearly illuminates the historical connections between personal ambitions of 'sexual respectability' (Mosse 1985: 1) and the conservation of property and wealth between particular families and within specific communities, neighbourhoods and classes. Mosse (1985) notes the simultaneous emergence of nationalism and 'respectability' which he defines as 'the manners, morals, and sexual attitudes normative in Europe ever since the emergence of modern society' (Mosse 1985:1). 'Gentility', 'cultural refinement,' 'discipline' and 'sexual propriety' distinguished the white governing colonial classes from both other 'racial types' and poor whites in the colonies and the imperial centres (Hobsbawm 1975, Stoler 1986). Modern global racial hierarchies were simultaneously harnessed to the idea of two 'sexes' or absolute, immutable 'sexual difference', clear and distinct gender roles and 'sexual propriety' (Bauer 2011, Mignolo 2011). Jade responds to directives on 'decency', 'sexual morality' and 'normal', 'psychologically healthy' sexual practice which is carefully balanced between 'sexual excess' and 'sexual abstinence' and tied to notions of 'romantic love'.

She simultaneously responds to discursive demands on 'appropriate' forms of feminine bodily deportment and bodily style embedded in the demonstrations of others. Jade traces her terror of being or becoming 'unkempt', 'fat', 'ugly' and 'grotesque' as she describes how she turns upon, attempts and 'fails' to control her appetite for food and mould her body. She conveys her struggle to lose the weight she had gained during pregnancy and her desire to return to an 'appropriate' and 'beautiful' bodily form following the birth of her son. She encountered these directives on 'beauty' through the concern and fear of others for her 'health', 'wellbeing' and 'happiness' as they prescribed a bodily weight that they inscribed with 'youthful beauty', 'physical perfection' and

'sexual desirability' yet one which is classified in contemporary, medical discourse as 'underweight' and 'unhealthy'.

Jade illuminates connections between 'unremarkable' normative directives on 'appropriate', 'normal' and 'graceful' forms of bodily size, bodily form and demeanour, being a 'competent' mother and wife and a 'capable', 'self-controlled', 'refined' and 'beautiful' woman. The 'classical' ideal of beauty that she relentlessly pursued rests upon ideas of the grotesque and excessive which both fascinate and disgust and which continue to mark distinctions between different 'types' of 'women' such as the lady, the mistress, the affluent courtesan and the common prostitute (Bauer 2011). Stallybrass and White (1986) describe the 'grotesque body' in terms of

'impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories), heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentred or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices and symbolic filth. . . physical needs and pleasures of the 'lower bodily stratum', materiality and parody (Stallybrass and White 1986: 23).

Jade describes her daily pursuit of 'physical perfection' and how she reproduced notions of 'beauty' and 'desirability' harnessed to thinness, feminine fragility, heteronormative 'sexual purity' and 'whiteness'. These ideals of 'beauty' depend on chaining other bodily forms and 'facial features' to notions of poverty, uncleanliness, disease, promiscuity, degeneracy, criminality, political dissent and other 'racial types' (Gilman 2000, McClintock 1995, Skeggs 2011). Jade thus reveals how other bodies which are 'socially peripheral may be symbolically central' (Stallybrass & White 1986: 23). She further exposes the nationalist allure of physical uniformity within white, transnational upper and upper middle class social worlds. Jade thus turns to and crafts her own body *and*

other bodies *as* she responds to the numerous cultural norms embedded in the practices of others. Her *repetitive reinscription* of her own *and* other bodies, her bodily demeanour and her reiterated practices of bodily stylisation *produce* the *effect* of an individual, undivided and spontaneous core or *essential* self which is defined by 'natural', 'biological' and 'psychological' 'capacities' and cultural 'characteristics'. Jade inscribes and sculpts her own *and* other bodies, transforming, as Hall notes, the discursive into the 'biological' and the 'physiological' which are in turn 'read further up the chain; socially, psychically, cognitively, politically, culturally, civilisationally' (Hall 1996: 24).

Jade produces her 'own' duties and desires in response to and out of the discursive demands that she encounters. Her responses can be traced in her acts of obedience, veiled defiance and open disobedience. Jade is not simply inscribed by others but revolves back to and crafts herself as she both reproduces and modifies if not *creolises* the innumerable irregular and contradictory normative directives that she encounters in the daily practices of others. She thus reveals how this process of self-fashioning or self-colonisation does not take place alone and how we are not clearly separate from one another. The discursive ideals that she must respond to such as notions of 'beauty' and 'sexual propriety' have come into existence and been redrafted at different historical moments in different localities. Jade reproduces ideas of clear, immutable 'anatomical differences' between subjects, 'normal' and 'abnormal' desires, notions of 'psychological health' and ideals of 'beauty' produced by nineteenth-century discourses of medicine, biology, comparative anatomy, sexology, anthropology and philosophy. Jade illustrates how we revise, reproduce and re-layer these ideals in our daily practical life. She demonstrates how it is through in part this ordinary, everyday practice of

crafting our own *and* other bodies that ideals and norms from different historical periods are both reproduced *and* remade and how this unsettles any clear distinction between coloniality and postcoloniality. Jade reproduces notions of romantic love, marriage, motherhood and youthful beauty *as* she consolidates existing unions between specific families *within* upper and upper middle class communities and particular neighbourhoods in *both* Kingston and London. She reveals connections between being 'thin' and 'beautiful' and embodying the heteronormative virtues of feminine delicacy, propriety, sexual purity and self-sacrifice *and* belonging in white transnational upper and upper middle-class communities in contemporary Kingston and London.

### **On revolution and reiteration**

Jade remembers her indifference towards the political activity of other students at university who she had encountered years earlier as she also conveys how puzzled she was by her own political disinterest at this time. She further recalls the counter-discourses she was confronted with through the concern and disappointment of her father, brothers and maternal aunts *as* she remembers the political narratives of other students which emphasised 'sexual autonomy' and 'political disobedience' as an alternative route to 'personal fulfilment'. Jade recalls the value ascribed to acts of 'speaking out', public protest and engagement with the politics of the curricula across all disciplines. She also remembers the reiterated political demand that students need to participate in political projects beyond the university campus such as those which address the pathologisation of black cultures, police violence against black youth and the living conditions of prisoners. These are notably the same political cultures and political concerns which were ignored, misunderstood, ridiculed or pathologised by her

peers from the Jamaican and British upper and upper middle classes. Jade further recalls how students encouraged each other to engage with political campaigns beyond Brighton in different British cities. She is introduced to different social and political worlds in London and other cities yet ventures into them *years after* she first hears of these localities. She also describes how she gradually begins to piece together connections between the criminalisation of 'black communities', imprisonment, torture and war and the demands for radical criminological and sociological curricula yet again years after she is faced with these political discourses. She illustrates how we may not immediately respond to the new norms that we encounter and how our cultural and political identities do not simply gradually develop or unfold.

Jade conveys her disbelief and disappointment when she discovered that giving up work outside the home, marriage, motherhood, affluence, comfort and respectability did not provide her with the fulfilment they had always promised. She remembers the idea of 'being single' as undesirable, unthinkable and impossible. She stated 'I wanted to leave but I didn't want to leave. Because you know . . . [awkwardly] there's a stigma about being single. And I'd never been single before. *I* didn't know if I could do this by myself' before she recalled her bewilderment that the 'good life' with her 'very gentle' husband that she had relentlessly pursued had led her 'to lose everything'. Jade recalls the disappearance of her 'own' thoughts and her preoccupation with her appearance, weight loss and ageing, her mother's incomprehension and disappointment at her decision to leave her husband and the delight and relief of her father, brothers and sister when she did. She similarly remembers leaving the international NGO where she was once so eager to work for a local branch of a small charity in the London neighbourhood in which she now lives.

Jade reveals the clear correspondence between personal and political preoccupations, the silences she reproduces and enforces and her political community. She recalls classifying herself as 'white' as she remembers her insistence that particular political concerns such as policing 'black communities', discriminatory sentencing practices and deaths in custody are not those which define 'our fight' or 'my struggle'. She silently defined herself as 'white' which she translated as 'racially neutral' as she ascribed specific political preoccupations and projects to other bodies and political communities. Jade recalls reproducing and harnessing together ideas of unthinkable same sex desire, romantic love, marriage as the sole path to happiness and *completeness*, property ownership, financial security *and* belonging as 'a young woman' in a 'respectable' affluent 'white', highly mobile transnational community. She then however describes redefining herself as 'mixed' and 'black' in the U.K embracing notions of diasporic Jamaicanness and Caribbeanness and illuminates rather than ignores the routes of her African, Amerindian and Chinese family through the Caribbean. She pushes away inventions of 'whiteness' as 'normal', 'neutral' and 'universal' and appears to turn away from the respectable, affluent Jamaican *and* British upper and upper-middle class communities that she once embraced.

Jade's words and other practices do not reflect an undivided subject whose daily practical activity kaleidoscopically changes when faced with new discursive directives or as they enter a new social world. They points towards a divided and discordant subject who collides and struggles with themselves *as* they patrol their daily practice and reiterate the *unimaginability* of other practices yet *as* they may pursue the possibility of, for example, other political affiliations or possible loves. Jade reveals how

the subject is in continuous revolution as she turns back upon and inscribes herself *and* others. These reiterated practices are performed *as* new practices may begin to come into being albeit unsteadily and reversibly *as* we reply to and interpret the cultural directives we encounter. These replies or responses to new directives may adjust or refashion and/or fortify, untangle, displace or clash with the earlier permissions and prohibitions which govern our practice. We thus confront, collide and tussle with ourselves *as* we repeat *and* rewrite our daily bodily practical activity. Jade describes colliding with and being defeated by herself as she pursues 'fulfilment' by becoming a wife and mother and attempting to discipline her body into a thin, youthful and 'beautiful' form. This project of self-cultivation and these practices of taking care of her home and others however lead her to a state of isolation and exhaustion that she believed affluence and respectable heteronormative femininity would protect her from. Jade unexpectedly describes herself as someone who had 'lost everything' which led her to 'leave' everything that she once desired and pursued relentlessly. Her words which describe her 'failure' to discipline her body *and* the untidy and unruly gulf between what she insists that she desires *and* her daily bodily practice further reflect a divided and discordant subject.

Jade does not solely and simply move from one bounded community and relatively homogeneous culture to another *as* she redefines herself and rewrites her political preoccupations. She does not merely relocate herself from the homes she shares with her husband in white affluent neighbourhoods and communities in Kingston and London to living independently in a more 'mixed' or 'black bohemian' community (hooks 2006) in a predominantly working-class, ethnically diverse London neighbourhood nor does she simply step into an anti-imperialist, anti-war and anti-



racist political culture. Jade's trajectory reflects numerous and potentially incommensurable political positions, priorities and political silences, varying degrees of outspokenness and political vulnerability *and* different classes *within* transnational anti-colonial and anti-racist political cultures in the Caribbean, U.K and beyond.

Jade traces how a new sense of political belonging has come into being. A new attentiveness towards austerity, mass unemployment and imprisonment, for example, has emerged and replaced a brutal indifference towards the poor and prisoners. An absence of thought has been replaced by a political thoughtfulness towards the policing of 'black communities', unemployment, spending cuts to numerous services, facilities and benefits and the increase of university tuition fees. What was once unnoticeable and unobjectionable such as a ruthless yet 'normal' political disinterest, an absence of concern and an 'ordinary', 'unremarkable', banal hate directed at black youth has been reconfigured into a constellation of 'important political issues'. Jade insists that she has thrown off the conservatism and respectability that has always defined her as she gathers together new political concerns which revolve around affordable housing in London, the displacement wrought by gentrification and the need to carefully protect her finally won yet precarious independence. She reinscribes herself with new capacities and abilities as she assembles new political priorities illuminating again how political communities are unbounded, endlessly heterogeneous 'communities of interpretation' (Said 1997) composed of potentially antagonistic positions. Jade draws from overlapping and heterogeneous radical anti-imperialist and anti-racist political cultures, from sexual liberation movements, bohemian, urban solo sub/cultures and public street cultures which are both transnational and based in particular urban localities (Klinenberg 2012). In the shadow of the 'London riots' of 2011 and the revival

of particular political projects which revolve around the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, indefinite detention and policing black youth, Jade seeks and finds a discursive space with other adults of varying ages at political meetings in different locations, in community centres and in particular cafes, bars and nightclubs in her neighbourhood. She creates 'a new life' where she claims that she can live freely from the constraints of domesticity and sexual respectability. The new social relationships she is beginning to cultivate simultaneously lead her to new discursive sites such as political organisations in new neighbourhoods in London and Kingston that would once have been unthinkable for her to visit. What was once unimaginable and undesirable such as 'living independently' without a husband with whom she owned property, shared financial security and opportunities to travel in Asia and Europe and enjoy the luxurious leisure spaces of Kingston and London has now not only become imaginable and desirable but a political ideal. Turning away from and abandoning her pursuit of thinness and youthful beauty has similarly become another political principle. The political ideals of autonomy, freedom and what Klinenberg names 'restorative solitude' (Klinenberg 2012: 18) have replaced marriage and 'compulsory coupledness' (Weeks 2007). A new fascination with and discovery of 'public culture' has replaced a social life shared with her husband and other couples from the same class and transnational communities. She introduces her son to the possibility of multiple carers, new discursive spaces and new responsibilities and duties in the home that they live in together *as* she takes her place in social worlds which are feared and pathologised by those she had once loved. Jade continues to draw different elements together such as the political ideal of autonomy for a young woman of colour from diverse yet intersecting discursive sources from different times and places. She draws from black feminist, black socialist, anti-war and anti-racist political cultures reflecting, as Asad argues, 'a shifting pattern of convergence

and dispersal of contingent elements' (Asad 2007: 95). She joins or hybridises and creolises the political ideals that she encounters. Jade insists however that she has turned away from the respectability, conservatism and affluence she now ascribes to her former peers. Living alone with her son in her own property, being financially independent and 'being free' from the demands of sexual propriety may be seen however as new markers of distinction (Klinenberg 2012) if not respectability which may be deployed to pathologise more 'traditional' others who cannot afford the same freedoms. Jade's scatter-gun ascription of conventionality, respectability, conservatism and affluence to others that she once loved sits next to her ownership of property that those from the communities she now belongs to cannot afford and next to her obliviousness that her new peers will soon have to leave their neighbourhood. She thus reveals again the heterogeneity within communities, classes within classes, differences in precariousness and political vulnerability and the gaps between our political ideals and our daily psychic and bodily activity.

## **Conclusion**

This essay is framed by debates on humanisms and anti-humanisms and essentialist and anti-essentialist theorisations of racialisation. It advances 'an anti-anti-essentialist' (Gilroy 1993b: p102) model of *biocoloniality* which draws from and builds upon theorisations of liquid, tumbling and endlessly unravelling cultural identities. It argues for a divided and discordant subject who collides and struggles with themselves as they patrol and repeat *and* redraft their daily practice. The essay advances a theorisation which can accommodate how our daily bodily activity produces the *effect* of an

individual 'core', 'essential' self who 'possesses' distinguishing 'biological' and 'psychological' 'capacities' and 'characteristics' and 'cultural traits.'

This model of biocoloniality is composed of two strands of theorisation on 'inscription and creolisation' and on 'revolution and reiteration' respectively. In the first part of the essay 'on *inscription* and *creolisation*' and in dialogue with my interpretations of the words and other practices of a respondent on 'respectability' and 'beauty', I argue that we respond to the directives embedded in the words and other practices of others on where, in which bodies or which political community to locate particular attributes, qualities or political concerns. We are not simply imprinted by others but turn upon and inscribe ourselves through revising and reproducing if not *creolising* the innumerable and potentially antagonistic normative demands that we encounter in our ordinary, daily practical life. We turn back to and carve ourselves with and out of particular 'capabilities', 'predispositions' and 'characteristics' such as 'decency' and 'civility' as we inscribe others with 'indecent' and 'incivility.' I argue that it is through this ordinary, daily practice of fashioning our own *and* other bodies that we reproduce *and* revise notions of 'inherent biological', 'psychological' and 'cognitive' 'abilities' and 'attributes' and cultural 'traits' that have come into existence and been re-layered and revised in different localities at different historical moments. In the second part of the essay 'on *revolution* and *reiteration*', I argue that we produce an experiential sense of a spontaneous and autonomous 'core self' defined and characterised by distinguishing 'biological' and 'psychological' 'capacities' and 'qualities' and cultural 'traits' through a continuous reinscription of our own and other bodies. We tussle with, overpower and subdue ourselves as we reinscribe ourselves and others *and* reinscribe and reinvent different discursive ideals.

The essay thus draws from and interweaves different theoretical threads from work on biopolitics and governmentality, racialisation, psychoanalysis and postcoloniality, performativity, sexualisation, intersectionality and repetition together. It offers a model of biocoloniality which can illuminate how the identity of the subject unfolds as it stays the same. Drawing from the words and other practices of a respondent which revolve around 'respectability' and 'beauty', the essay aims to illuminate how we (re)produce different regulatory ideals such as notions of distinctive 'biological' and 'psychological' 'abilities' and cultural 'characteristics' such as 'gracefulness', 'decency' and 'whiteness' and chain them together in our ordinary, daily biocolonial practice. It hopes to illuminate how respectability remains, as Mosse (1985) and Harvey (2011) note, deeply entrenched in contemporary transnational postcolonial cultures. It further reflects how we are all implicated in what I name the *biocolonisation* of different 'populations' or the invention of different bodies that are closer to and more distant from notions of the human, the un/respectable, ab/normal, un/desirable, ir/replaceable and expendable. The essay thus aims to contribute to discussions on the correspondence between how we craft ourselves and others or the biologisation of our own and other bodies *and* postcolonial governmentality in contemporary neoliberal disciplinary social orders.

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