Chapter Title: Revisiting race and nation: double consciousness, Black Britishness, and cultural consumption

Book Title: Black middle-class Britannia
Book Subtitle: Identities, repertoires, cultural consumption
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Published by: Manchester University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvr0qssx.10

Revisiting race and nation: double consciousness, Black Britishness, and cultural consumption

S INCE MOVING to London in 2016, I found that the Senate House Library provided a good sociological writing climate. It was fair to say that I had become quite familiar with the space surrounding the Senate House and got into a standard routine of working until lunch time, grabbing a sandwich to eat in the park, working until the late afternoon, and hopping back on the Piccadilly line to go home. Little did I know that each day I was going to the Senate House Library, I was moving through a space that was rich with Black British culture and history.

Indeed, the theme of space has been running through this book so far. I considered how the symbolic boundaries of middle classness often lead to the construction of white middle-class physical spaces, also showing how members of the Black middle class create their own physical cultural spaces as a means of solidarity and resistance. In this respect, my work implicitly connects with the longstanding interest social theorists have had in space and place. Looking back at this literature, a common theme is that the production of certain spaces is needed for the reproduction of wider social-structural relations.[1] However, we can take the matter even more critically. For instance, how do social-structural relations prevent certain spatial imaginaries? How do hierarchies make sure that certain spaces get social meaning, while the social meaning of other spaces is erased? Why – simply put – did I have to spend ten pounds for a Black history tour to find out that down the road from the Senate House Library in 1943, Learie Constantine (a Black British cricketer) was not allowed to stay in the Imperial Hotel, leading him to take court action aspiring to radically challenge the London hotel colour bar?[2] Why did I have to go on this Black history tour to also find out that the space I had been inhabiting – the Senate House – had a plaque of Mary

Prince, a pioneering anti-slavery activist in nineteenth-century England, hidden away around the back of the building? If anything, these instances point not to the production of social meaning into space, but rather to the non-production of social meaning into space; they demonstrate exclusions of meaning that are justified through larger social-structural relations.[3]

These non-productions of meaning, I argue, stem from the overall devaluation of Black Britishness that inflicts the British racialised social system. Scholars such as Kapoor have referred to this devaluation in terms of a doxic British 'racial amnesia',[4] Joseph-Salisbury refers to it as 'white amnesia',[5] and Stuart Hall simply calls it a 'profound historical forgetfulness'.[6] Syntax aside, the semantics could not be clearer. An erasure of Black Britishness, and Black British histories, is an integral part of British racial hierarchisation. This chapter contextualises my participants as not just Black, nor just Black and middle class, but rather as Black British middle-class subjects. Through this contextualisation, I look at how the participants construe the 'British' aspect of their identities and use cultural consumption as a means of resistance to this 'profound forgetfulness' that plagues the British racial structure.

The changing same. But different?

It has been more than twenty years since Gilroy commented that 'today's racist ideologies render Blackness and Britishness mutually exclusive social and cultural categories'.[7] The 'Go Back Home' signs that greeted previous colonial subjects arriving in Britain have simply been painted on the side of vans.[8] The Thatcherite policies of turning British citizens from former colonies into undesirable immigrants in the 1980s now translates into the deportation of people from the Windrush generation back to Caribbean countries (in some cases, these people are being deported to Caribbean countries within which they have no ancestry).[9]

Over the long durée, therefore, it seems legitimate to argue that Britishness and British citizenship have always been equated with whiteness: race and nation have been, and continue to be, inseparable. Within sociological literature, the conflation between whiteness and Britishness became a salient issue of study in the 1970s and 1980s.[10] Especially with the rise of the putative 'new conservatives' in the 1980s, scholars focused on the 'new racism' which defined the British nation as the white nation.[11] However, just like torn jeans and sportswear, this 'style' of 1980s racism has also become fashionable in our present day. Thinking about 'Brexit Britain', for instance, both Bhambra[12] and

Hunter[13] comment that the dominant frame which inspired Britons to vote to leave the European Union was a white 'purging' of the nation. While popular media often frames this political happening in the context of Islamophobia and xenophobia against Eastern Europeans, anti-Blackness is still ingrained in this racialised definition of the nation-state. Thus, in the aftermath of the EU referendum result being announced, it was not just EU nationals and visible Muslims who were threatened in acts of street racism; Afro-Caribbeans were subject to such acts as well.[14] Thus, the same polarisation between Blackness and Britishness which was central to the cultural racism of the 1980s still rears its ugly head in contemporary times. Perhaps this is a striking example of Bell's concept of racial realism – the notion racial progress is but a myth.[15]

We can play around with this concept of racial realism to interrogate the notion of 'social change'. Perhaps a key difference between the racial structure of the 1980s and our present day (2018) is that a Black middle class has both emerged and solidified in our economic order.[16] Simply put, therefore, it seems obvious that there has been some form of (racialised) social change between the 1980s and 2010s. However, through the concept of racial realism we get the notion that racial progress is not simply a 'linear affair', and instead it is often accompanied with 'shifting mechanisms reproducing changes in racial inequality'.[17] If the polarisation of race and nation has been a constant feature of the British racial structure for the past half century, then it seems more prudent to say that when it comes to race and racism, social change is often accompanied by social stability.

Nevertheless, in my research I found that resisting this 'stability' of the polarisation of Blackness and Britishness was a key facet of many of the participants' cultural lives. I want to use this chapter to tease out what these cultural resistances and contestations to the polarisation of Blackness and Britishness can tell us more generally about Black middle-class identity, British post-racialism, and the general (US)Americanisation of Blackness. We can approach these cultural resistances through the lens of Du Bois's concept of double consciousness.

Say it loud: I'm Black (British) and proud

Double consciousness and Black British identities

More than 100 years ago, Du Bois put forward the concept of African American double consciousness: 'this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes

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of others'.[18] Many scholars have interpreted Du Bois's concept of double consciousness as a theory of *identity*. Thus, scholars have highlighted how Du Bois used the notion of double consciousness to 'reflect the tension he believed Black Americans experience as they negotiate two "unreconciled" identities: their status as Americans and their status as Blacks'.[19] Through this lens, double consciousness becomes an identity strategy used by those racialised downward as 'a survival mechanism in which the racially oppressed learn through time not to show their real selves to the dominant'.[20]

It is especially through this lens of double consciousness as an analysis of *identity* that the participants of my study perceive their Black Britishness. However, owing to the fact that these participants are also middle class, this identity of Black Britishness is perhaps not only one of 'double consciousness' but something much more plural. This notion of further pluralising Black identities from simply a 'doubled' consciousness was evoked by Gilroy, when he proclaimed,[21]

> it doesn't seem productive to try to transplant or reinvigorate the old ideas so that, for example, being a Black European … could be considered analogous to what being an American and a 'Negro' meant when Du Bois was writing *The Souls of Black Folk* and speculating about the constitutive power of the 'color line'.

In this ethos of thought, when Rollock et al. were analysing Black middle-class identity, they proposed that[22]

> the Black middle classes are living through not a double consciousness (as Du Bois has famously theorized) but instead through a set of multiple consciousnesses as they move back and forth the class and race divides within different social spheres populated by audiences and actors of varying race and class backgrounds.

Approached this way, 'Britishness' becomes important to the identities of many of this study's participants, in a way that it is co-articulated along with gender, race, and class. Britishness thus becomes incorporated into such participants' 'multiple consciousness' as they move within and through different areas of social space. Through this multiple consciousness, the 'British' aspect of my participants' identities often becomes more or less salient in different interactional spaces. This is well captured in an interchange I had with Abebi when we were

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discussing how she construed her identity. To begin with, Abebi says quite firmly that she identifies as 'Nigerian':

> If someone asks me where I'm from, I'll say I'm Nigerian – even though I was born in England … I feel if a white person asks, or non-Black person 'Where are you from?', they can see I'm Black, they can probably hear from my accent that I'm from London or I'm British, so I therefore assume that the question they're asking is really 'Where are your parents from?' or 'Where's your heritage from?'. So my answer to that, I don't say London because that's not what they're asking, I say Nigeria. Erm, however, if a Nigerian person asked me that, I'd say I'm Yoruba or I'm from Lagos. I'd say this information because they already know I'm Nigerian. So, I think for me, my answer depends on who is asking. However, I don't think I can ever remember a time where I've answered that with 'I'm English', or 'British', I don't personally view myself as British.

As we can see, depending on the interactional encounter ('my answer depends on who is asking'), Abebi construes her identity in different ways. Indeed, from this quoted encounter along, Abebi's position seems similar to the Nigerian-descended people living in Britain encountered in Imoagene's research, where such people often have an ambivalence towards the 'British' aspect of their identity.[23] However, right after this quote, I asked Abebi why she does not identify as British, to which she then revised her position:

> So for me, to identify as a British person is not just to live here but also means the cultural elements of being British. And I love living here, and I've loved growing up here, but the things I've been brought up with, and culturally I've always been African. Maybe it's Black British, because now if I compare myself with someone born and raised in Nigeria, actually we have a different view of things. So maybe I'm more Black British, or British African, but there's definitely that African element of it which shapes who I am.

On reflection, therefore, Abebi does incorporate Britishness into her identity within a larger set of identity 'consciousnesses'. In a similar stream of thought, Dawn pointed out her frustration with being classified as a 'second-generation West Indian immigrant, not a Black British person who can identify how she wants to'. After Dawn claimed this, our conversation proceeded,

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> Ali: Right. I mean you talked about being Black British?
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> Dawn: I think it depends. I don't know if it's the same as everyone. For me it shifts depending on where I am, who I'm speaking to, erm, and, what time of day it is [laughs]. No, it depends on the situation ... I think that Black British is something that goes down, sometimes, well here [in Britain]. I can't say Black British in France – they don't accept that as a concept. And in America, they, erm, I've been called African American with a British accent [laughing] – so you know, I don't, I don't. If you're Black you're African American, they don't accept that England has Black people! And this isn't everybody, you know, but, yea. And when I was in France, they'd be overwhelmed when I said I was Black and from Britain. And they ascribed me with Britishness which meant either Dick Van Dyke or the Queen [laughs].

Similarly to Abebi, therefore, Dawn shows how the 'British' aspect of her identity is interactionally specific – 'it shifts depending on where I am, who I'm speaking to'. As Dawn claims, the British aspect of her identity becomes more salient particularly in the British context, whereas when she travels to France or the United States, identifying as 'Black British' becomes construed as problematic or nonsensical. In this respect, Black Britishness becomes a form of racialised 'national repertoire' – it becomes a group categorisation that is available to be taken up by the Black diaspora within Britain.[24]

In terms of Black Britishness as a 'structure of feeling',[25] or as a racialised national repertoire, this means that as an identity Black Britishness constantly evolves as its surrounding racial structure develops. Compared to previous research on Black British identity as provided by seminal writers such as Stuart Hall,[26] Paul Gilroy,[27] and Claire Alexander,[28] many of my participants claimed how being 'Black British' in our current historical juncture – with increasing immigration from West Africa – involves an increased mixture of 'West African' and 'Caribbean' iterations of Blackness and Black culture. For instance, Martin described this changing pan-ethnic, racialised nationality of Black Britishness as such:

> Being Jamaican was very much lined up with that first generation of being Black British. ... Increasingly, for a number of reasons, as you'll know, recent census shows the British Black community is increasingly a community with a West African accent, a West African heritage, its future is essentially going to be carried by people of West African heritage. And,

as a result, there's an adjustment that every Black British person needs to make as you make a jump from Caribbean dominated, kinda sense of what it means to be Black British to a West African dominated sense.

Martin claimed that this 'shift' in what it means to be Black British was itself an identity motivated by the fact that Black Caribbean and African people tend to live in close social and spatial proximity to one another. However, not all of my participants grew up in neighbourhoods with lots of other Black people in London. Neither did these participants go to schools with many other Black children. In these cases, the 'script', or repertoire of Black Britishness was not as clearly accessible to them, and they had to find other means to work out what Black Britishness means to, and for, them.

Ijeoma, for instance, grew up in an area of North London that was majority white, also going to a majority white elite school. This meant that Ijeoma relied on her family as a source for discussions on Black identities and histories. However, Ijeoma's problem was that her mother and grandmother – with whom she lived – did not explicitly talk about these areas of Blackness with her. This was not because Ijeoma's mother and grandmother did not have any affinity towards Blackness – as I have described in terms of the class-minded Black middle-class identity mode. Rather, it is because they had lived most of their lives and gone to school in Nigeria, where they were not racialised as a minority. In this context, they did not have to learn about 'Black history', because it was simply presented as national history. As Ijeoma explains,

I think my parents' generation and the older generations take it for granted that they know about history. Because they have never been an ethnic minority, they were born and raised in Nigeria, everyone knows about the history, everyone is aware of those things, because it is like a habit …, and then, yea, within Nigerian history, I think you just take for granted that you know your history and your kids will know. I mean it's, I don't know Yoruba either [laughs] – so they didn't even get as far as teaching the language, let alone the actual history of our tribes and so on. And now they're really frustrated I don't know it! I'm just like, 'Where did you expect me to pick it up from?' [laughs].

Not only did Ijeoma therefore not have an interactional setting for discussions around Blackness, but she claims her problem was deepened by the fact that she was the first in her family to be distinctively 'Black British'. Given that Ijeoma

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was not learning about Black Britishness in her school, and lacked interactions with other Black Britons, this constrained her ability to take up the national repertoire of Black Britishness. As she comments,

> And I don't really think it's ever really occurred to my mum that I wouldn't learn stuff about Black history, and also, you know, to my mum and to my grandma, Black British history is not our history. Because we're not, because we're not really Black British; we're Nigerians who live here. I'm the only person, my generation and younger, we're the only ones who are Black British. So that's not something they would have been able to teach me, because they wouldn't have known about it.

In response to this, Ijeoma took it on herself to teach herself about Black history and Black Britishness. However, to begin with, she mentioned that Black history was most commonly accessible through a US-centric perspective. She describes first encountering Black history in school:

> The first time we learned about Black history in any form was on my G-, was it my GCSE, no it was AS-level history course, we did American civil rights, that was the first time I'd done any form of Black history at all.

This sparked a curiosity inside Ijeoma's mind, leading her to seek out 'Black literature' in her spare time. Again, this literature was mostly US-focused:

> I would seek out bits of history – so I read *Roots* by Alex Haley, and I read various books. So I would read things, I read things like that. That's the kind of literature I would read. But never, I think, maybe it's just a lot easier to find literature that relates to Black American history, so I never actually read anything about Black British history … I've had to consciously think about what being Black means to me. I need to be a lot more clued up about what being Black and British is.

After moving to Brixton in South London, having graduated from Oxford, Ijeoma claimed that institutions such as the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) helped her learn more about Black Britishness. She recalled attending events run by the BCA – such as Black Britons in the First World War – as well as these institutions' events (such as on Rastafarianism in Britain) to help contextualise and associate herself with Black Britishness.

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Double consciousness: from identity to epistemological second sight

I have described Ijeoma's narrative at length because I believe it points to another aspect of Du Boisian double consciousness beyond simply a focus on identity. Of course, the identity aspect is still present – as Ijeoma claims, she needs to 'be a lot more clued up about what being Black and British is', and she tries to work this out through learning more about Black British history. However, Ijeoma's narrative also points to the Du Boisian concept of 'second sight' – another key component of double consciousness. This second sight involves Ijeoma's realisation of the exclusion of Black British narratives from mainstream cultural production – as she claims, 'it's just a lot easier to find literature that relates to Black American history, so I never actually read anything about Black British history'; indeed, Ijeoma has to go out of her way and attend courses at the BCA to help her learn about these excluded narratives. I argue that the 'Black Britishness' of many participants of this study enables them to acquire a second sight to effectively critique the British racial hierarchy.

Inspired by Du Bois's work on double consciousness,[29] there has been a resurgence in sociologists paying attention to the 'second sight' of racialised minorities living in Britain.[30] As Virdee comments, this second sight commonly refers to how racialised minorities have historically possessed[31]

> a form of privileged epistemological standpoint which allowed them to see things as they really were, equipping them to expose the inequities of a system because they experienced it most directly and powerfully.

Expanding on this concept, Meer shows how this 'second sight' thus involves 'a way of seeing things that escapes the notice of the majority … serving as a means to probe deeper meanings and contradictions of a racialised experience and providing the resource for transformative change'.[32] From Du Bois's first theorisation of African American double consciousness, through to its contemporary use for discussing 'racialised outsiders' more than 100 years later, there has therefore been an underlying theme and use to this concept. Namely, double consciousness stresses that those who are racialised as minorities within their respective nations come to understand the workings of inequality within that nation in a way that often escapes the notice of the majority. Being 'Black British' constitutes a form of double consciousness in this regard. Being racialised 'downward' enables Black Britons to understand the fundamentals of what it means to be British,

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and how British identity itself is not just a box you tick on a citizenship or census form, but itself an 'imagined' state of being that amalgamates with ethnicity and race (and consequently ethnic and racial domination).[33]

The Black British 'second sight' encountered in my research involved critiques of British post-racial ideology. Within sociological literature, there is a growing cognisance that post-racial ideology is becoming increasingly globalised with similar international compositions (for instance, by containing components such as the 'myth' of racial progress, equivalence between anti-racialism and anti-racism, and culture of racial equivalence).[34] However, what this extant literature also needs to contend with is that the United States possesses a form of racial gravity; post-racialism in many nations – including Britain – often works by geographically displacing racism on to the United States: 'racism exists over there, not here'.[35] Indeed, this geographical displacement of racism was even propagated by some of my participants who were towards the class-minded identity mode, as they adopted the repertoire of post-racialism. Keith, for instance, talked about a conversation he had with another Black professional colleague:

> we were talking about race relations in America compared with race relations in the UK. There are almost no parallels. So we were busy demonstrating to one another there were no parallels. And [friend] said 'There are no doors in this country than I cannot go through'. And it is true. As I sit here – there are no doors one cannot go through.

In contrast to this class-minded position, other participants of this study used their second sight as Black Britons to effectively criticise the view that Britain was a post-racial utopia. Indeed, this second-sighted critique of British racism was often framed around a critique of the (US)Americanisation of 'Blackness' and racism. This critique can be teased out in the case of Morgan, as we were discussing a predilection he has towards Black British literature. Referring to the recent Hay Literature Festival, Morgan commented,

> So, people within that space are dominated by white people, most of the people on the ground are white women, most of them are upper middle class, most of them went to a handful of universities, and act accordingly. So just a very brief example of that being attending a panel at the Hay Festival, and hearing the head of Bloomsbury defend her record of

publishing, erm, well defend the fact that they have published very few people of colour who are British, by saying well they published Maya Angelou, or Toni Morrison, or something like that, and failing to see that you know, that isn't publishing Black British history [laughing]. That's just publishing Black people from America. Black people in Britain and Black people in America are not the same [laughs] you know? This is kind of the myopia we deal with.

Morgan's prescient remark, 'Black people in Britain and Black people in America are not the same [laughs] you know? This is kind of the myopia we deal with', was replicated across other participants' critiques of British post-racialism. Throughout my ethnography, for instance, many of the folks I talked with would make an especial effort to support art with a focus on Black Britishness as a means to contest the (US)Americanisation of all race-related phenomena.

For instance, on the first Black history walk I attended, we were guided around the Bloomsbury and Soho areas of London. At one stage of this walk we were in the British Museum, waiting for an elderly lady and her daughter to go to the bathroom. I spoke with one lady, who I will refer to as Melinda, about whether she was enjoying the tour, and we got on to the theme of Black British history. Melinda commented that she has had an interest in Black British history since her teens, but twenty years later she now only sees African American history and achievements being regularly presented in the United Kingdom. She comments that this helps racism in Britain 'go under the radar' while the legacies of Britain's racist history are simply forgotten. Especially now Melinda's niece is in secondary school, both Melinda and her sister have been actively working with the school to improve their Black History Month, given that for the past years the school celebrates Black History Month through focusing on the civil rights movement in the United States, highlighting figures such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr, and pop-culture icons such as Beyoncé and Mariah Carey. Melinda's complaints were twofold: that Black British history was excluded, and that the current Black supposed 'role models' were all in the same industry and not related to what she called more 'intellectual' pursuits. Attending these Black history walks, along with attending events and courses at the BCA and Bernie Grant Arts Centre, Melinda claimed, not only helped her satisfy her own desire for culture exploring Black Britishness, but helped her spread this knowledge with her family, friends, and other Black Britons. Indeed, I had an almost identical interaction with Sandra, the aforementioned woman who was also on the

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curator's tour of *Soul of a Nation* in the Tate Modern. In this case, Sandra claimed that while cultural institutions are interested in exploring racism in other national contexts (in this case, the United States), 'We are some way off having our stories included in this space.'

One of my interview participants, Dominic, formed a similar critique of the *Soul of a Nation* exhibition. In a similar frame to Sandra, he argues,

> All these institutions are very comfortable with things from abroad. They are. So everyone can wallow in the American context, the Black American experience, very comfortably and very arrogantly from afar. But really, we had a Black arts movement in the UK! And it was vibrant for many years, and challenging, and provocative. I don't see any major exhibitions about that. There was something in Nottingham recently, which was done as a retrospective. But, it didn't travel anywhere. It didn't come to London any size. So, again, we can do the American story quite comfortably with big size and scale, but let's not have *ours* on display for too much.

Our conversation proceeded,

> Ali: And from a personal experience, is it frustrating to have little amounts of art which explores the Black experience *in Britain*?
> Dominic: So yes, personally I think it's extremely sad and an indictment on our society, an indictment on our middle-class custodians of power, that we are still having the same conversations over and over again – in an unrelenting fashion. … why are we having problems with the content? – because white, white middle-class professionals have *no idea* about Black cultural life and content. So how would they make judgements on it?

These collected narratives all point to a similar dynamic of Black British second sight. The Du Boisian principle of second sight is that the racialised minority is epistemologically able to realise their society's hierarchies in a way that escapes the perception of the dominant.[36] In this case, Morgan, Sandra, Melinda, and Dominic all appreciate that there are specificities to both British racism and to Blackness in Britain, and contrast their epistemological standpoint with others who do not possess such a second sight, whether that be literature gatekeepers, art curators and institutional boards, white teachers, or simply 'white middle-class professionals' in Dominic's narrative.

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Double consciousness, identity, and second sight in the triangle of identity

It seems as though double consciousness influences Black British middle-class identity in two predominant ways, therefore. On the one hand, double consciousness is reflected through the lens of identity, where Blackness and Britishness are seen as two disparate components of one identity, separated by historical and present social processes of national, racialised exclusion, rendering the Black Briton a 'familial stranger' in their own land.[37] On the other hand, double consciousness is embodied in the second sight that many Black Britons have that enables them to see beyond the veil; through being racialised as Black, but nationalised as British, such Black Britons acquire a second sight that allows them to criticise contemporary British racism.

Taking a closer look at the participants of this study, it appears as though these two aspects of double consciousness carry different salience for different participants, depending on their position in the triangle of identity. While those towards strategic assimilation often display Black British double consciousness in terms of identity management, those towards the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode display double consciousness in terms of second sight. This has significant implications for both clusters' practices of resistance, everyday anti-racism, and cultural consumption.

Double consciousness and strategic assimilation

Underlying the strategic assimilation identity mode is a form of double consciousness where individuals construe Blackness and Britishness as two disparate parts of their identity that need to be brought into harmony with one another. One way this harmony is achieved towards the strategic assimilation identity mode is through consuming cultural forms that synthesise what are construed as traditional British and traditional Black diasporic cultural elements. This cultural preference adds a new layer to the research on strategic assimilation as a Black middle-class identity mode. Whereas previous research focuses on how those involved in strategic assimilation move between, and culturally consume, in both white and Black spaces,[38] my research demonstrates how many *also* seek out cultural and social spaces that supposedly contain elements of both the Black and white worlds.

Miriam demonstrates this strategic assimilation position. Miriam and I were discussing the recent BAFTA awards, and the success of what were decoded as

'Black films'. Miriam pointed out that all these films – *Moonlight*, *Hidden Figures*, and *Fences* – were focused on the African American experience. In contrast to these US-centric films, she claimed she had recently been to a British film festival called 'Shakespeare Shorts' – independently made short films based around Shakespearean plays. She proceeded,

> Miriam: And at least two of them were erm made by Black people. But you know, they were brilliant. One of them was SBTV erm Jamal Edwards, they did a whole rap around Shakespeare's Globe, telling the story of the Twelfth Night. And that was superb. And then, also, there was one called *Dear Mr Shakespeare* with Basha, who performed in the white House in front of Obama actually – he's a British Dominican – *Dear Mr Shakespeare*. And that was superb – about Othello, he was playing Othello, it was brilliant. But again, it was great. But you had to know a bit about Shakespeare to understand what's going on, but that was so good, and you know, the two Black films in particular, I believe, would resonate with Black teenagers. It's people they know, people they respect, people they think are cool, just talking about Shakespeare, so it will open minds. It shows that culture isn't fixed by what race you are, and that we can have these conversations across these fixed categories. It was really good.
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> Ali: So there's almost a [pause] personal significance to this, Shakespeare kind of –
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> Miriam: [Interrupts] Yeah, exactly. It shows me that 'liking Shakespeare' doesn't mean you are or are not a certain level of Black. It shows me that, also, that being Black doesn't mean you have to not like things like Shakespeare. And that we can have this cultural conversation, being 'Black' or, erm, 'person of colour' but also appreciating the culture of here, where we belong.

Interestingly, Thomas[39] also had a narrative involving a synthesis of what is decoded as 'Black' diasporic culture with Shakespeare. In Thomas's case, he was working on a project where children from a school in Jamaica come to England and perform a Jamaican interpretation of a Shakespearean play. About his motives on working on this project, he commented,

> I also wanted Jamaica to be taken more seriously on the planet, so connecting with the Great British icon is interesting, because that's better than just

saying 'Here is a reggae band' or 'Here's some other stereotype'. So, you know, it's a nice way of kinda still having that conversation in the world about my identity and my culture, and at the same time addressing the mainstream.

I introduce these narratives from Thomas and Miriam, not only because they are both about Shakespeare, but because they highlight the anti-racist aims – and drawbacks to anti-racism – underlying the double consciousness of strategic assimilation. On the one hand, the anti-racist aims of this strategic assimilation double consciousness are clear, and again they are guided by the repertoire of cultural equity. In this instance, the repertoire of cultural equity is iterated in Miriam's claim that she does not believe Blackness constrains one's ability to engage with a traditional highbrow cultural form ('culture isn't fixed by what race you are … being Black doesn't mean you have to not like things like Shakespeare'), and Thomas's quest for 'Jamaica to be taken more seriously on the planet'.

However, despite their anti-racist conscious efforts, this strategic assimilation course of action ends up reproducing the racial structure in certain ways. In particular, this strategic assimilation 'synthesis' of putative Black and British cultural forms seems to give more value to the latter, and consequently demonstrates an uneasy relationship with so-called Black culture. The incorporation of the 'British', or the 'Shakespeare', seems to work as a cultural component that 'uplifts' the Black component. Straightforwardly, this is seen in Thomas's seeming polarisation between 'respectable' Shakespeare and 'stereotypical' reggae; he asserts that engaging with Shakespeare is a better way to give a positive portrayal of Jamaica, rather 'than just saying "Here is a reggae band" or "Here's some other stereotype"'. While Miriam is not as overtly dismissive of Blackness as Thomas is, there is still an element of her narrative that shows some limitations to an effective anti-racism. Namely, Miriam talks about how these Shakespeare films performed through rap music 'would resonate with Black teenagers', helping to 'appreciat[e] the culture of here, where we belong'. In this case, Shakespeare is construed as the universal 'culture of here, where we belong', whereas rap is implicitly relegated to a more particular cultural form for Black folk.

Perhaps this is where the 'middle class' aspect of Miriam's and Thomas's identities becomes especially pertinent to discussion too. Namely, as cultural theorists have shown, because of the 'over-proletarianisation'[40] of Black people in Britain, historically what has become 'Black culture' – including rap, mentioned by Miriam, and reggae, mentioned by Thomas – in Britain has acquired a

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necessary association with working-class consciousness and struggle.[41] Miriam's and Thomas's narratives tap into this historical formation of Black culture; adding something traditionally highbrow, such as Shakespeare, into the cultural form allows for the 'Black' culture to be upwardly mobile into the realms of respectability. Of course, this position is in tension with the desire of those towards the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode to uplift Blackness and Black culture independent of white confirmation.

Afro-centrism and the second sight of the ethnoracial autonomous

Those towards the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode espouse a double consciousness based around an epistemological second sight. Here, rather than Blackness and Britishness being two components of one's identity that need to be holistically articulated, those towards the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode use their Black Britishness to critique the veneer of British post-racialism. Such individuals thus use cultural consumption again as a means of resistance to the racial structure, as they seek out Black British cultural forms, and support Black British cultural producers, with the aim of uplifting Black British history and increasing awareness of Britain's past and present racial projects.

This ethnoracial autonomous, double conscious second sight was particularly salient in my conversation with Dominic. Dominic was talking about becoming a grandfather, and given his repertoire of Afro-centrism, he was inspired to keep diasporic histories and cultures alive in his family tree. This led him to particularly pursue an interest in Black British art, and he makes an especial effort to attend art exhibitions about, and to collect art exploring, Black Britishness. After I commented on his art collection, he replied,

> I buy too many pictures! I haven't got enough wall space for pictures, I haven't got enough walls. And I've bought three recently – it's not good! I do. But I try really to get a sense of the Black British story. The Black British imagery, where possible. Not overly 'poppy', but, but I have a sense [pause] let me show you my worry. My worry is that as the white structure negates our presence and stories, we too also do that by default. What I mean by that – because I can see your question-mark frown – what I mean by that is erm, our schools will bombard us with white stuff, white writers of stories, white writers of history, white perspectives of history, the lot. If you do Black history, so called, it starts with slavery

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– who wants to know about that story? And, erm, any other stories are about empire. So, so you end up with having no sense that there is another side, another dimension, another shared history to explore. You spend your time doing, therefore, your A-levels on the same narrow band of knowledge, because it has been passed on. You go to university, and you *might* stumble upon a book, or some characters, but that is somewhat late in the day – but that's the only time you may have. And *even then* you might find, as my daughter did, that lecturers aren't keen to explore race-related topics, even if it's in psychology, because it's uncomfortable. So where is the knowledge base going to come from? We need to feed our people, that they have stories, and they have a presence, and there is a dynamism that is beyond racial tension.

Immediately, a difference can be seen between Dominic's narrative and the narratives of those closer towards strategic assimilation. Those towards strategic assimilation, on the one hand, are concerned to uplift Black cultural forms via synthesising them with other 'traditionally' British cultural forms that are given more value and recognition within the white symbolic space. On the other hand, those towards the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode are not concerned with white recognition as such; in fact, as is captured in Dominic's narrative, the absence of white recognition is taken as a starting point: 'My worry is that as the white structure negates our presence and stories, we too also do that by default.' Indeed, Dominic's comment that 'We need to feed our people' itself speaks to the ethnoracial autonomous repertoires of Afro-centrism and browning, that recognition of Blackness and Black Britishness must be achieved through Black resistance itself, and the burden of achieving recognition thus largely falls on the shoulders of Black folk.

Another subtle difference underlies the strategic assimilation and ethnoracial autonomous iterations of Black British double consciousness. Namely, on the one hand, towards strategic assimilation, there is a reification of Blackness and Britishness as two identities in conflict, and an underlying desire to articulate these facets of identity into a reconciled whole. This is why Thomas talks about 'having that conversation in the world about my identity and my culture', and Miriam says that 'It shows me that "liking Shakespeare" doesn't mean you are or are not a certain level of Black.' On the other hand, those towards the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode are less concerned with an identity reconciliation, and more so with a resistance to the erasure of Black Britishness, thus speaking

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to the more general difference between the strategic assimilation repertoire of code-switching and the ethnoracial autonomous repertoire of browning. This ethnoracial autonomous resistance is further demonstrated in an exchange I had with Toby, when discussing literature.

When discussing literature, Toby did not construe Black Britishness as a doubled consciousness (Blackness 'and' Britishness) in need of a holistic articulation, but as a historically constituted singular identity in itself, requiring constant acts of resistance to processes of erasure and exclusion. Discussing his interest in Black British writers, he proceeded,

> There is a reason why my shelf is like this, yes? Zadie Smith, check. [Malorie] Blackman, check. And classics – Selvon, James, Lamming – again, yes, they're there. They give me something different, differences to reflect on. I am a book worm – so I read a lot – but these reflections on race and society in Britain [pause]. They are invaluable to me, Black Brit, my parents could have been living a street away from Selvon! The reflections need to be known as our history, because even come October [Black History Month] I'm not sure this is talked about at all. [laughs] Very British – polite, 'We don't talk about that! No way!'

On the very same theme of British literature, Dominic also commented,

> I would be [pause] *horrified* [pause] yeah, I'll use that word, it's a nice word, if my kids had no idea that there were engaging titles by African, Caribbean, and Asian writers – South American writers as well. Which, in the UK, is easy to do … This speaks to the fact that our stories are not of any relevance.

In both Toby's and Dominic's cases, therefore, we see the support of Black British cultural forms as a means of resisting the racial structure. In these cases, the racial structure involves both devaluation of Black Britishness (as Dominic claims, 'This speaks to the fact that our stories are not of any relevance'), as well as the exclusion of Blackness from the national repertoire of Britain (as Toby claims, 'The reflections need to be known as our history … I'm not sure this is talked about at all'). Towards the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode, therefore, the consumption of Black British cultural forms gets tied to the repertoire of browning: the anti-racist desire to resist and reconfigure the racial structure.

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Black Britishness, cultural capital, and symbolic boundaries

I want to conclude this chapter by reflecting on how this discussion of Black Britishness, and Black British cultural forms, feeds into discussions of cultural capital and symbolic boundaries. This discussion is important to recognise some of the underlying similarities across the cultural lives of many of this study's participants, regardless of their differing cultural repertoires.

Throughout this book, I have been engaging with the notion of cultural capital as a cultural resource used to reproduce material inequalities and/or to curate boundaries between different social groups.[42] Through this chapter's discussion, it is undeniable that many of the participants of this study – regardless of whether they oscillate towards strategic assimilation or the ethnoracial autonomous identity mode – use cultural capital as a resource to curate symbolic boundaries around Black Britishness. As Lamont and Molnár clarify, symbolic boundaries are concerned with 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize people … also separat[ing] people into groups [which] generate feelings of similarity and group membership'.[43] Through this definition, it is evident that participants of this study are using the consumption of Black British cultural forms to generate feelings of Black British group membership. This is why, throughout this chapter, we have seen participants drawing links between Black British cultural forms with inclusive language such as 'We', 'Us', and 'Our'; Dominic claims that supporting Black British cultural forms enables him to challenge the way that '*our* stories are not of any relevance', Miriam claims that '*we* can have this cultural conversation, being "Black" … also appreciating the culture of here, where *we* belong', and Toby talks about Black British literature being '*our* history' (emphasis added in all quotes). While my constructed triangle of identity pinpoints some differences in the repertoires and strategies of action across my participants, there is a foundational similarity in how they use Black British cultural forms as a means to draw an inclusive boundary with other Black Britons – both past and present.

One of my participants, Lawrence, commented to me that the very fact that you have to add 'Black' as a precursor to certain things – such as 'middle class', or 'feminist' – signals that the phenomenon by default excludes Blackness. We can think about Black Britishness in this same way. Why does 'Black' need to be added as a precursor to British, and what does the 'Black' do to the meaning of 'British' once it is added? I can only agree with Lawrence that the 'Black' is still added because it is a racialised category that is seen to exist outside the confines of authentic Britishness; the fact that many of this study's participants

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were concerned with drawing boundaries around Black Britishness highlights a wide recognition of this reality. The Black racialised outsiders of the British imperialist core from almost 100 years ago retain their status as racialised outsiders in the twenty-first century; they remain a focal point of comparison from which authentic 'Britishness' can be imagined, practised, and made as white.[44] While previous research has suggested that one way for racialised minorities to 'become' more British was by becoming middle class,[45] this chapter has demonstrated the existence of a Black middle class who still recognise racialised barriers to national group membership. This speaks to the inevitability and omnipresence of racism – even in domains of social space that appear to be non-racial. It is this theme of the inevitability and omnipresence of racism that I now want to expand on.

Notes

1 See Lefebvre, 2004; Soja, 1980; 1989.
2 See Hill, 2018.
3 de Sousa Santos, 2001.
4 Kapoor, 2011.
5 Joseph-Salisbury, 2018: 6.
6 Hall, 2016: 145.
7 Gilroy, 1993a: 58.
8 Jones et al., 2017; Solomos, 2003.
9 Bhambra, 2017; De Noronha, 2018; Hall, 2016.
10 CCCS, 1982.
11 For instance: Gilroy, 1982; 1987; 1993a, b; Hall, 2016; 2017a; Virdee, 2014a.
12 Bhambra, 2017.
13 Hunter, 2017.
14 Parveen and Sherwood, 2016.
15 See Bell, 1980.
16 Although there are suggestions that creating this Black 'bourgeoisie' was a central aim of Thatcher's 1980s government as it attempted to reproduce the capitalist system. See Daye, 1994.
17 Ray et al., 2017: 149.
18 Du Bois, 2007 [1903]: 34.
19 Lacy, 2007: 251. Of course, this shows that Du Bois (2008 [1920]) rightfully demonstrated how 'American' identity was racialised as white, as argued in the *Souls of White Folk*.
20 Stanfield II, 2011a: 233.
21 Gilroy, 2010: 152.
22 Rollock et al., 2011: 1088.
23 Imoagene, 2012; 2017.

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24 On national repertoires and the cultural construction of available group categorisations see Lamont, 1992; Lamont et al., 2016; Lamont and Molnár, 2001.

25 Williams, 1977.

26 Hall, 1996.

27 Gilroy, 1993a, b.

28 Alexander, 1996.

29 Du Bois, 2007 [1903].

30 For instance, Meer, 2018; Meghji, 2017a; Rollock et al., 2011; 2013; 2015; Virdee, 2014a; 2017.

31 Virdee, 2017: 2403.

32 Meer, 2018: 7.

33 Brubaker, 2009. On the impossibility of race and ethnicity without racial and ethnic domination, see Bonilla-Silva, 1999; Emirbayer and Desmond, 2015; Goldberg, 2009.

34 See Costa, 2016; Meghji and Saini, 2018; Song, 2014.

35 For example, see Gilroy, 1993b; Lewis, 2012 and Telles, 2006.

36 In this regard, Du Bois's work on double consciousness is foundational for contemporary work examining 'white ignorance', and how perception is influenced by one's position in the overall racial structure. See Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Meghji, 2018; Mills, 2017; Mueller, 2017; 2018.

37 Hall, 2017b.

38 For instance, Anderson, 2011; Lacy, 2006; 2007; Rollock et al., 2015.

39 I perceive Thomas as lying at the boundary between the strategic assimilation and the class-minded identity modes.

40 Wright, 1989.

41 Gilroy, 1993a; 1998; Hall, 1993.

42 Drawing on the cultural sociological tradition of Michèle Lamont. See Lamont, 1992; Lamont and Molnár, 2001; 2002; Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Pachucki, Pendergrass and Lamont, 2007.

43 Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 168.

44 Virdee, 2017.

45 Gilroy, 1998; Lorimer, 1978; 2003.

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