



African-Caribbean Women: Migration, Diaspora, Post-diaspora

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Introduction

This Special Issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* (CRGS) includes articles that have been developed from a two-year project of collaboration between London South Bank University and the Institute for Gender and Development Studies Mona Campus Unit at The University of the West Indies. The project was led by Suzanne Scafe (LSBU) and Leith Dunn (IGDS Mona) and was funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for twenty months from 2017. Its purpose was to establish a Research Network of scholars from the Caribbean, Canada and the UK. The title of the research network was African-Caribbean Women's Mobility and Self-Fashioning in Post-Diaspora Contexts. The aim was to explore specific ways in which gender enables or necessitates African-Caribbean women's mobility, and the unexpected intimacies and experiences that emerge from these mobilities. The project developed a concept of "post-diaspora" in order to articulate the political, imaginative, affective and economic affiliations that challenge the proscriptions of the nation-state. It asked how this concept can be used to reimagine new ways in which African-Caribbean women achieve agency through mobility in twenty-first century contexts of globalization, transnationalism and deterritorialization. In our meetings, workshops and conferences, Network members returned to expanded concepts of diaspora and examined how existing definitions of diaspora might be used as a way of describing Caribbean women's plural identities and multiple sites of belonging. Post-diaspora, then, is neither a departure from, nor a continuation of contemporary usages of diaspora: rather the "post" signals a new problem space that allows us to imagine new futures by focusing on mobility both as a defining feature of Caribbean identities and as a route to self-fashioning for African-Caribbean women. Rather than linear journeys that result in the reconstitution of a remembered past in a present of new physical and cultural geographies, post-diasporic journeys are rhizomatic: they radically reconfigure the assumed significance of "home" and "away". In rhizomatic journeys, roots are provisional and unfixd. Routes are often circuitous, and return – physical, rhetorical and economic – is a key component of Caribbean women's mobility in an

increasingly globalized world (Trotz 2006; Mullings and Trotz 2013; Fog Olwig 2012; Putnam 2014; Lawson 2013 Reynolds 2008, 2011). In this Special Issue, contributors use concepts of diaspora/post-diaspora to examine the ways in which Caribbean women reimagine their affiliations and identities beyond those that pertain either to the nation state or to fixed notions of culture (Rushdy 2009; Thomas 2007; Gilroy 2004, 2011; Hall 2007).

African-Caribbean Women's Mobility and Self-Fashioning in Post-Diaspora Contexts Research Network: activities and outcomes

The Network facilitated a transdisciplinary, trans-historical and transnational dialogue around themes of diaspora/post-diaspora in a collaborative environment that created what members described as an "oasis of serendipity" and psycho-social support. Our dialogue spanned three countries and took the form of meetings, seminars, workshops, performances and a final conference. The first meeting and the final conference were held at London South Bank University in April 2017 and July 2018 respectively. The second dialogue was held in September 2017 at the UWI Mona Campus and the third was held in April 2018 at the University of Toronto. The following questions were addressed by a wide range of scholars. First, taking into account the emphasis on multi-directional mobility and instability, what are the gender dimensions of concepts of post-diaspora for African-Caribbean women? Second, how do non-linear forms of mobility and the production of multiple affiliations produce the conditions for African-Caribbean women's agency and self-fashioning? Third, how does an expanded concept of return, including circulatory patterns of migration, the return of goods, money, culture and ideas, assist in the articulation of post-diaspora identities? And finally, what forms of expression are available to reconfigure identities as post-diasporic?

The articles in this Special Issue continue and reflect the dialogue begun in these transnational exchanges. Our first meeting in London in April 2017, examined existing research that related to our Network's themes. Leith Dunn's focus on

migration and globalization reminded participants that migration is a major feature of Caribbean people's history and cultural identity. Survival strategies that have been adopted in response to globalisation have been developed during centuries of enslavement and the colonisation of women, men and children in the Caribbean. Caribbean waves of migration at distinct periods in history have been in response to emerging demands for labour to fuel economic growth. This has included Caribbean migration to build the Panama Canal; migration to establish plantations for export and processing raw materials, and migration to Europe to fight as service women and service men in the British Army during the first and second world wars. "First generation" Caribbean women who settled in European diasporas were often recruited as nurses, housekeepers, caregivers, hospitality workers, teachers and auxiliaries in the British Army. Globalisation, Dunn argued, serves as a push factor for Caribbean migration in response to limited job opportunities, high levels of unemployment and poverty, especially for women. Waves of migration from the Caribbean region to other regions have also been linked to the search for education and job opportunities within and outside the Caribbean archipelago. Inhibiting factors to settlement in host countries include entrenched forms of discrimination on the bases of gender, class, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Analysis of the globalisation trends also show that migration has been feminised. Since the 1980s, more Caribbean women than men are migrating to North America and Europe in search of a better life, better education and a better standard of living. Many of the Caribbean women who migrate are single female heads of household with triple roles and responsibilities, consistent with Moser's (1993) gender analysis framework. These include: productive (paid) work, reproductive (unpaid) work, caring for the very young, sick and elderly and also community management work. The diverse forms of migration experiences range from planned migration to forced and illegal migration as well as circular migration, as individuals move from their homelands to overseas countries and return voluntarily or are forced, as illegal over-stayers, to return.

Presentations by other participants at this first meeting included work that focused on: the role that women played in the black supplementary school movement in the UK (Andrews 2016); the gender dynamics of migration narratives in “Jamaican transnational families”; and the historical and contemporary significance of concepts of “political blackness” used, in a UK context, to articulate a black feminist praxis. Gemma Romain presented work that uses archival sources to examine the experiences of African-Caribbean women who migrated to study in the UK in the 1920s and 30s; her presentation reflected research used in a recent publication *Race, Sexuality and Identity in Britain and Jamaica: the biography of Patrick Nelson 1916-1963* (2017). Beverley Mullings’s paper explored the ways in which “more mobile and enabling articulations of diasporic identity, particularly among second and third generation women, could enhance the transformative potential of diaspora/state encounters in the multiple spaces that constitute the Caribbean diaspora”. Several participants framed their presentations with a series of questions around the extent to which the journeys between “home/s” might enable the construction of emancipatory subjectivities. Andrea Davis’s paper focused on forthcoming research that uses “three tropes – horizon, sea and sound – to frame an understanding of out of place identities, of bodies that are “slippery, amorphous, expansive and transformative”. These tropes, Davis argued, are “layered one upon the other and are in many ways interdependent”. By applying these tropes to work by African and Caribbean Canadian writers, Davis’s presentation examined the ways in which a settler colonial nation like Canada can be made more critically aware of itself and the inequalities it perpetuates.

The Network’s second activity was a two-day seminar hosted by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), Mona Unit at The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona Campus in Jamaica and was held in September 2017. It included presentations from early career scholars at the UWI Mona Campus, Natasha Kay Mortley, Aisha T. Spencer and Saran Stewart, whose work is included in this publication. A key feature of the research network’s activities has been our public events that have included performances and readings

from the work of contemporary African-Caribbean-diasporic women writers. The seminar in September 2017 also included a public forum, with a guest lecture by UWI Mona's Professor Paulette Ramsay, based on her novel *Aunt Jen* (2002) and a discussion underscoring the nexus between writing, language and identity. In her lecture, Ramsay emphasised the value of writing as a means of exploring identity formation, discovery and reclamation. Other presenters were Tanya Shirley, who read from her recently published poetry collection *The Merchant of Feathers* (2014), and Velma Pollard who read her short story "My Mother" as well as extracts from the series "On the Way to Somewhere, Of Course" from the collection *Considering Woman* (2010). Pollard's work, which examines in detail the affective consequences of Caribbean women's migration, speaks directly to the Network's themes.

The Network's third activity was a two-day workshop hosted by the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto and was held in April 2018. The workshop extended the themes of the Research Network by focusing primarily on migratory routes between the Caribbean, Canada and the UK. The issues raised were wide-ranging but can be encapsulated by Denise Noble's presentation which examined "the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality ... and the interdiscursive cultural politics, lived poetics and quotidian mass-mediated practices through which diasporicity is produced as a practice of being". The workshop programme included a public forum entitled "Black Feminist and Queer Organising in Canada and the UK: Early Years to the 1980s". The panellists were Suzanne Scafe, Beverley Bain and Junior Harrison. There was also a public performance of Honor Ford-Smith's *Song for the Beloved*.

The Network's fourth and final activity was a two-day conference hosted by London South Bank University and was held in July 2018. In response to a Call for Papers, the programme included contributions by scholars from Europe, the UK, the US, Canada, Japan and the Caribbean countries of Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Gina Athena Ulysse, one of two keynote speakers, offered a lyrical meditation on the politics and poetics of movement and

suspense, culling diverse archives in search of an unsettled post-diasporic blackness. Alecia McKenzie read her short story "Full Stop" from the anthology *Satellite City* (1992), and from a forthcoming collection of poetry that reflects her experience as a Jamaican writer living in Paris and negotiating a diasporic identity that moves between, and sometimes engages with African and Caribbean communities un/settled in Paris. The conference programme also included two book launches. The first was the launch of British author Diana Evans's third novel *Ordinary People* (2018) which, like her previous work, is a meditation on what it means to be black and British and how an intersection of African, Caribbean and white British cultures contribute to those identities. The second was the launch of the 2018 edition of the ground-breaking publication *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, originally published in 1985. The new edition contains a foreword by London-based teacher and black feminist activist Lola Okolosie, and an Afterword which is an extensive discussion with all three authors, chaired by Professor Heidi Mirza.

The cover of this Special Issue features the work of Desrie Thomson-George, a Guyanese-born, UK-based visual artist who was the co-founder of the Black Ink Collective (1978-87), an independent publishing house and the first to publish work by young black British writers and artists, many of whom have continued to have successful careers in the creative arts. The conference hosted Desrie's first solo exhibition entitled: *Jilo-the Survivor*.

African-Caribbean Women: Migration, Diaspora, Post-diaspora

This Special Issue includes contributions from Research Network members and workshop participants, most of whom have presented at the Network's activities in London, Jamaica and Canada. The first two articles focus on "first generation" fictional characters and activists who are negotiating spaces for agency in unwelcoming diasporic homelands. Andrea Davis's article, "Un/belonging in Diasporic Cities: A Literary History of First-Generation Caribbean

Women in London and Toronto” centres on an analysis of fiction by Beryl Gilroy, Joan Riley, and Makeda Silvera. By foregrounding the novels’ forgotten female characters, the article examines Caribbean women’s migration stories as a narrative of un/belonging, marking their distinctive relationship to the settler colonial state and the British empire as an ongoing search for independent self-actualization. The article argues that the incongruity between Caribbean migrant women’s dreaming of a romanticized home/coming and the reality of recurring traumatic loss, creates a constant dystopic tension that plays out in the novels as a struggle between an imagined be/longing and familial, national and cultural disarticulation. This tension between a “post-diasporic” desire for national be/longing and a diasporic reality of displacement and loss also implicates the novels’ characters in the designs of empire. Characters’ movements away from the hegemonic nation and toward a diasporic condition, therefore, mark a journey toward a more critical self-awareness in which they develop a greater capacity to both critique colonial imperialism and the family as the bedrock of the Caribbean nation.

The second article in this Special Issue is Jenny Douglas’s “Black Women’s Activism and Organisation in Public Health: Struggles and Strategies for Better Health and Wellbeing” which focuses on UK based black women’s health activism. Using Avtar Brah’s concept of “diaspora space”, Douglas argues that black women in the UK have organised in diaspora space to challenge inequities in health and to develop strategies to improve health outcomes for black communities. She explores the post-war contribution of black women nurses in the UK to public health, both as activists for change and as organisers of change. Douglas concludes by exploring the confluences and synergies between the concept of “diaspora space” (Brah 1996) and that of “(post) diaspora” as espoused by Scafe (2018), arguing that both concepts are useful for understanding the ways in which black women have used their agency to challenge health inequities.

Natasha Kay Mortley's "More than Dollars and Cents: Leveraging the Multiple Roles of Caribbean Migrant Women within the Diaspora for Sustainable Development" returns to a focus on migration that has been a constant thread throughout our seminars and conferences, arguing that women from the English-speaking Caribbean have rarely fit into traditional theories of migration and the Westernized ideal of the trailing and passive wife accompanying the male breadwinner and migrant. Caribbean migration from the 1960s onwards, has shown that women, motivated by a complex range of factors, migrate independent of men, and play a critical role in facilitating the movement of other family and kin, as well as in the circular flows of goods, services, knowledge and technology. Drawing on the theory of love power migration by Baldwin and Mortley (2016), Mortley demonstrates that Caribbean female migrants from the English Caribbean exercise love and care within the family, and use migration as a strategy for survival, rebuilding and empowerment. She argues that because Caribbean women's migration is based on a complex decision-making process incubated and determined by love power migration, there are even more reasons to maintain strong ties with multiple households and communities in the country of origin. These ties, nurtured by women's caring role, foster the creation of a transnational space linking multiple households, networks and diaspora communities.

Suzanne Scafe's article "Gendered, Post-diasporic Mobilities and the Politics of Blackness in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016)" extends the concerns, expressed in presentations by UK scholar and Network member Denise Noble, with Caribbean subjectivities that emerge in the context of Black Atlantic journeying. Using Zadie Smith's novel *Swing Time* (2016), she analyses the ways in which, by traversing the geographies and temporalities of the Black Atlantic, the narrative unsettles conventional definitions of a black African diaspora, and interrogates easy gestures of identification and belonging. In her analysis of the narrative's representations of mother-daughter relationships and female friendships, Scafe demonstrates that experiences of diaspora/post-diaspora are complicated by issues of gender. Borrowing Nassy Brown's concept of "diasporic resource", Scafe suggests that dance is used by its young female characters as a

“diasporic resource” (Nassy Brown 2005, 42), and is a means of negotiating and contesting existing structures of gender, class and culture. Forms of black dance and African diasporic music also represent the novel’s concerns with the gendered nature of mobility and stillness.

Another article that focuses on literature, speaking to and extending the issues raised by Paulette Ramsay’s *Aunt Jen* (2002), is Aisha T. Spencer’s “Reshaping Girlhood, Reimagining Womanhood: The Female Child Protagonist and the Post-diasporic Condition in Jamaican Female-authored Children’s Literature”. Spencer argues that the female child protagonist has always been a major figure in the work of several Jamaican female fiction writers. More recently, however, Jamaican female writers from across the diaspora have begun to reveal a new kind of poetics through the presentation of their female child protagonist and the situations they encounter. Spencer explores the use of an emerging post-diasporic poetics in the work of Jamaican children’s literature author Diane Browne, which introduces fluid female identities constructed through the realities of globalisation and post-diasporic conditions. The female child protagonist represents a newly emerging female sensibility and consciousness, which enables readers to access both girlhood and womanhood through realities and perspectives tied to the migrant experience across different periods of time. Each protagonist portrays a self which exists beyond boundaries and outside the dictates of the social ideals framing femaleness and the female migrant experience, embedded for so long in Jamaican culture. Browne challenges both traditional and to some extent postmodern models of womanhood and female identity, through the way each of her female child protagonists are portrayed as they move through a post-diasporic process of navigating both self and space in Browne’s texts.

The 2018 London conference included papers which focused on autoethnographic examinations of diasporic/post-diasporic alienation, belonging and agency. Beverley Bryan used autoethnography as a research tool to explore the role of black women activists in the formation and evolution

of a black community identity in the austerity phase of Britain in the 1970s, and Leith Dunn's paper used her Cuban-born Jamaican mother's narratives to provide insights into the intersections of gender, race, class, religion and culture in diasporic identity formation. Saran Stewart's article in this collection develops this focus on autoethnography as a research tool, focusing on a research area and a "lived poetics" that has been central to our discussions as a Network of transnational black Caribbean women scholars. Stewart's article argues that black women are less likely to be retained in tenure-track faculty positions than any other gender and racial/ethnic group in higher education institutions. Black women encounter "dual acts of race and sex discrimination" from the academic community, arguably leading to disparities in the number of tenure-track black women faculty. Stewart argues that: "As an expat in my "foreign homeland", I am often reminded of how I must navigate power and privilege in the university as forms of resistance and subversion in a hetero-patriarchal hegemony". These various experiences of navigating the Caribbean academy while young, black and female, serve as an ideal backdrop for understanding the impact of colonial patriarchy and what can be done to dismantle it. Stewart employs an Afro-Caribbean feminist autoethnographic frame to deconstruct everyday derogatory acts, comments, and behaviour in the academy that devalue female academics by persons of professional hierarchy (known as hierarchical microaggressions). This work builds on Young, Anderson and Stewart's (2015) framework on hierarchical microaggressions and by applying it to Afro-Caribbean feminist thought, illustrates some of the conditions needed to create agency and a strong sense of the emancipatory self in order to transcend academic spaces.

Shirley Anne Tate's presentations for the Network have reflected and continued to develop her interrogation of the political, aesthetic and socio-cultural significances of the black woman's body and discourses of beauty within which black female subjectivities are articulated. In her article for this Special Issue entitled "The Dark Skin I Live in: Decolonizing Racial Capitalism's Aesthetic Hierarchies in the Diaspora" Tate argues that dark skin on black women's bodies has become a Black Atlantic diasporic (post) colonial artefact, circulating

discursively within the skin value hierarchy of racial capitalism. Tate uses a black decolonial feminist approach to analyse racial capitalism's "second skin", discourses of dark skin as contemptible object established prior to and during enslavement and colonialism. Drawing out its contemporary manifestations in the narratives of/about black women celebrities, her analysis shows that libidinal economies of dark skin continue to impact women's lives. Indeed, the impact of "second skin" discourses can produce alienation from oneself if one begins from shadism and/or whiteness. Tate concludes, however, that women with dark skin dis-alienate from "second skin" (Cheng 2011) discourses to construct the skins they live in as objects of love through naming and critiquing diasporic discourses which reproduce their skins as valueless. Through the routes of social media, their critiques of 'second skin' discourses produce and maintain alter/native constructions of dark skin value, a radical black aesthetic consciousness and a new "livity" within diaspora which unsettles dark skin's negation (Chevannes 1994).

GENDER DIALOGUES

Paulette A. Ramsay's "Interrogating Diaspora: Lessons Learnt from a Fictional Protagonist" develops her keynote address given at the public event organised by the Research Network in September 2017 at The UWI Mona Campus. Ramsay uses her popular novel *Aunt Jen* (2002) as a point of departure for engaging in a conversation on issues related to diaspora, migration, identity, gender and other post-colonial and diasporic issues. In her article Ramsay provides an overview of the novel, its epistolary structure, its focus on migration, and the effects of migration on children. Her discussion and analysis of the issues provide insight into family, maroon heritage, religious preferences and the resilience of a young girl faced with the silence of an absent mother who has migrated. The meaning of silence in the novel is addressed in relation to questions of diaspora. The bildungsroman's development amidst concerns with migration, questions of connection to country, individual identity and agency brings into focus several post-colonial and post-diasporic concerns of who wants to be part of a

diaspora and of how individuals may engage in the reconstruction of new diasporic identities and links to communities and nations.

BOOK REVIEWS

This Special Issue includes two book reviews. The first review is of Shirley Anne Tate and Deborah Gabriel's edited collection *Inside the Ivory Tower: Narratives of Women of Colour Surviving and Thriving in British Academia* (2017) by Nadene Docherty. In this anthology of autoethnographic essays, women of colour in British universities explore how their experiences are shaped by race and gender and how racism manifests in day-to-day experiences in the academy, from subtle microaggressions to overt racialized and gendered abuse. The second review is of Amanda Arbouin's *Black British Graduates: Untold Stories* (2018) by Pauline Muir.

A NOTE on contributors' use of [B]black

In UK scholarship "Black" is often capitalised, used to refer to what is termed "political Blackness", a strategic identity that takes into account the constructed nature of race and the history of Empire. In this context the term is "performative, relational, and dialogic rather than literal" (Gunaratnam 2014, 4). This Special Issue focuses on fluid, uncertain or shifting identities created by diasporic/post-diasporic journeys. Our contributors' use of "Black/black" reflects the term's identity as a "flawed signifier" (4) and emphasises the unfixed, unstable nature of identity privileged in these contributions.

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