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„The Windrush generation revisited:

how Black British women authors are reclaiming the West Indian narrative“

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Abstract

This Master's thesis investigates the (de)construction and subversion of gender, race, class, and desire in three seminal novels by Black British women authors: Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), Bernadine Evaristo's *Mr Loverman* (2013), and Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016). Adopting an intersectional feminist and postcolonial lens, the present paper conducts close readings to probe and contextualise the ways in which these authors construct, challenge, and redefine multifaceted Black British identities. The thesis postulates that despite the formal abolition of the slave trade, the lingering cultural and systemic vestiges of British colonialism continue to exert a palpable influence on the Windrush generation and their descendants. It further contends that intersecting systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity, converge to complicate their lived experiences, casting them as the 'other'. Moreover, the paper posits that Black British identities face systemic disadvantages in areas such as education and finance and are shaped by transgenerational cycles of poverty and powerlessness. In essence, the narratives told by Levy, Evaristo, and Smith should not merely be seen as fictional works, but also as critical commentaries deeply rooted in historical and sociocultural realities. Thus, they reclaim and reconfigure the narratives surrounding the Windrush generation.

200 words.

Abstract [Deutsch]

Diese Masterarbeit widmet sich der Untersuchung von Geschlecht, Rasse, Klasse und Begehren in drei wegweisenden Romanen von schwarzen britischen Autorinnen: Andrea Levys *Small Island* (2004), Bernadine Evaristos *Mr Loverman* (2013) und Zadie Smiths *Swing Time* (2016). Unter Verwendung eines intersektionalen feministischen und postkolonialen Ansatzes nimmt der vorliegende Text 'close readings' vor, um aufzuschlüsseln und einzuordnen, wie die Autorinnen komplexe schwarze britische Identitäten formen, infrage stellen und neu gestalten. Die Arbeit stellt die These auf, dass trotz der offiziellen Abschaffung des Sklavenhandels das Erbe des britischen Kolonialismus nachhaltige Auswirkungen auf die Windrush-Generation und ihre Nachkommen hat. Sie argumentiert zudem, dass verschiedene Unterdrückungssysteme, etwa Rassismus, Sexismus, Klassismus und Heteronormativität, sich wechselseitig beeinflussen und das Leben der Betroffenen komplexer gestalten, indem sie als 'die Anderen' marginalisiert werden. Darüber hinaus wird postuliert, dass schwarze Brit*innen systemische Benachteiligungen in Bereichen wie Bildung und Finanzen erleben und ihre (Geschlechts-)Identitäten durch transgenerationale Armutskreisläufe und Machtlosigkeit geprägt sind. Die analysierten Romane sind nicht nur fiktionale Darstellungen, sondern auch kritische Kommentare, die tief verwurzelt in historischen und gesellschaftlichen Realitäten sind. Sie wirken somit als Neukonfiguration der Erzählungen rund um die Windrush-Generation und tragen dazu bei, dass diese sowie ihre Nachkommen die Kontrolle über ihr eigenes Narrativ zurückerlangen.

199 Wörter.

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Back Home

We rushed in on the wind of a promise,
 they said come and build,
 build upon streets paved with gold;
We built our *Homes* out of unemployment and spit
We built our *Homes* out of 'no blacks signs'
We built our *Homes* out of crooked backs
 factory air and tired feet
 painted the walls with our public service
 tiled the roof with patriotism
for 70 years we called it *Home*:
it was still not enough,
they rushed in:
cold and cruel and biting,
stripped it down to the bare bones of Empire
 and showed us
exactly what our *Homes* were made of.

– *Theophina Gabriel* (2018).

Introduction

It has been 75 years since the HMT Windrush docked at Tilbury, setting the course for a new chapter of multiculturalism in post-war Britain. The ripples from her arrival are still palpable today: From cuisine to music, from literature to politics, the multicultural dynamism that the Windrush generation introduced has served as a wellspring of innovation and vibrancy. These West Indian immigrants have been instrumental in steering the post-war rebuilding and long-term economic vitality of the United Kingdom, as they navigated the turbulent currents of racial prejudice and systemic inequalities. Their contributions as, *inter alia*, long-standing taxpayers, vital workers in infrastructure and artists have been enriching the British fiscal and cultural landscape for decades. Yet, even as they have cast anchors and formed enduring ties to the UK, the Windrush scandal and lingering disparities in socio-economic status are poignant reminders of the unresolved issues that remain adrift – issues that are moored to a colonial past casting long shadows over the present. Adding to this complex situation is the fact that many Black¹ British individuals of West Indian descent find themselves ensnared in a vicious cycle: The lack of financial resources and opportunities, coupled with systemic discrimination, create a vortex that feeds into criminality and further deprivation. The legacy of the HMT Windrush and the eponymous generation has forever changed the social and cultural landscape of postmodern Britain, making this immigration movement a fascinating field for scholarly inquiry.

This Master's thesis, however, concerns itself not with the scandal itself and its aftermath, but primarily with the works of three Black British women writers who are reclaiming their narratives: Andrea Levy, Bernadine Evaristo, and Zadie Smith. All of them have familial ties to the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Levy's parents (Levy 2000: 4) and Smith's mother are of Jamaican descent (British Council 2023: 1), while Evaristo's father was born in Nigeria after her grandfather, a Yoruba Aguda², had sailed there from Brazil (Evaristo 2022: 6). Drawing upon their own backgrounds as well as their families', these three Black British authors explore, craft, and fictionalise

¹ Throughout the present thesis, with the exception of direct quotes, I capitalise terms relating to ethnicity, such as 'Black' and 'White'. Thereby, I emphasise that characteristics such as skin colour are more than a biological trait: They function as cultural signifiers within contemporary British society, which is still grappling with the consequences of slavery and colonialism.

² Amaros or Agudas are descendants of freed Afro-Brazilian slaves from Brazil who migrated to Nigeria.

the experiences of members of the Windrush generation from all walks of life, traversing, questioning, and subverting social categories such as race, class, desire, and gender as well as their various combinations. As I will subsequently elaborate, this is where my primary research interest lies.

At first glance, the novels I have chosen as my objects of analysis *Small Island* (2004) by Andrea Levy, *Mr Loverman* (2013) by Bernadine Evaristo, and *Swing Time* (2016) by Zadie Smith, are worthwhile to compare since they are set in different time periods (from the 1940s to the 2010s), feature different protagonists (from gay Black Caribbean men to heterosexual White British women), and address different topics (from illicit affairs to cultural appropriation). Yet, all the lives depicted are intrinsically interconnected through experiences of racism and the heritage of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in (post)colonial Britain. Evaristo, Smith, and Levy masterfully illustrate the different layers and shades of systemic oppression and how it operates in connection with markers of difference such as race, gender, class, and desire. In *Mr Loverman*, for instance, Evaristo recounts the story of an Antiguan man in his seventies called Barry, who has lived in Britain for half a century. In addition to his racial otherness, he is also covertly gay and, for decades, in a secret relationship with his childhood sweetheart, Morris, while his wife, Carmel, suspects he is cheating on her with other women. By contrast, Levy's *Small Island* is set in 1948 and contains flashbacks to WWII, following the White British Queenie, Bernard, and Arthur as their lives entangle with those of a Jamaican couple, Gilbert and Hortense. Smith's *Swing Time* is the only novel whose unnamed protagonist is not part of the Windrush generation itself, but a first generation descendent whose life could not be more different from that of her childhood best friend, Tracey. While the former ends up working for an Australian pop star who builds a girls' school in West Africa, the latter repeats a vicious transgenerational cycle of poverty, which ends her dancing career and leaves her with three children by three different fathers.

In short, Evaristo, Levy, and Smith's works offer fascinating literary perspectives on what it means to be Black and British, and how the experiences of the Windrush generation differ yet share common ground. This paper thus seeks to investigate how these three Black British women writers construct Windrush identities that, in their multi-layered-ness, subvert stereotypes and reclaim the migration movement's narrative. Accordingly, my primary research question is as follows: "How do Evaristo, Levy, and Smith construct and subvert notions of gender, desire, race,

and class in postcolonial Britain?”. To answer it, I perform close readings based on an approach that is informed by Black feminism as well as postcolonial studies, and I adopt an intersectional lens so as to amalgamate the two. My theoretical foundation is reflected in the secondary literature I use in the present thesis, which includes, for instance, scholars such as Ian Patel (*We’re Here Because You Were There* 2022), Reni Eddo-Lodge (*Why I’m no longer talking to white people about race* 2018), Stuart Hall (*The Fateful Triangle* 2017), Nell Irvin Painter (*The History of White People* 2010), bell hooks (*We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* 2004), Kimberlé Crenshaw (“Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics” 1989), Frantz Fanon (*Les damnés de la terre* 1961), and Roland Barthes (*Mythologies* 1973 [1957]). The theories and concepts used are woven directly into the analysis rather than isolated in separate chapters. This approach facilitates an integrated discussion that resonates across the works of Andrea Levy, Bernadine Evaristo, and Zadie Smith. This structural choice offers a more fluid narrative, seamlessly linking historical context, literary analysis, and theoretical insights.

Beyond enriching the extant body of literature on postcolonial studies and Black feminism, this thesis addresses an urgent need for a more nuanced exploration of the multifaceted identities of the Windrush generation and their descendants. By focusing on the literary oeuvre of three Black British women authors, this research situates itself at a rare crossroads in scholarly discourse. Although the interplay between feminism, intersectionality, and postcolonial studies is not uncommon, its specific application to these authors constitutes a fresh vantage point. This approach facilitates a critical examination of the dominant cultural narratives surrounding the Windrush generation. In addition, the present paper stands out further because it primarily – but not exclusively – draws upon Black novelists and theorists, thereby aligning its analytical lens closely with the experiences and perspectives of those most affected.

In an era marked by escalating debates on immigration³, racial and social inequality, and cultural appropriation, the insights yielded by research such as mine become increasingly important. While the thesis arguably does little to extend the reach of the already potent, influential literary voices of Andrea Levy, Bernadine Evaristo, and Zadie Smith, it sheds considerable light on the literary representation of

³ See, for instance, Suella Braverman's recent claim that multiculturalism has 'failed,' a return to rhetoric reminiscent of Enoch Powell, previously deemed unacceptable (Malik 2023).

a group that remains marginalised. Literature in this context functions not merely as a mirror for lived Black experiences; it serves, as this thesis repeatedly shows, as an active participant in the creation of cultural narratives and societal discourse. Essentially, my thesis sheds light on literary portrayals of systemic power imbalances perpetuated by colonial legacies that manifest through complex intersections of markers of difference. Thus, it aims to contribute significantly to what is often referred to as the 'third mission'⁴ of academia, by creating research on topics that are not only relevant for cultural literary studies, but also for socio-political discourses surrounding race, identity, and the Black diaspora.

In terms of overall organisation and methodology, the master's thesis is structured as follows: It is divided into four main chapters, each serving a distinct purpose. The first part, 'A Life Between Islands', lays the historical foundation in three parts: It begins with an examination of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Britain's role therein. Then follows an exploration of the Windrush era from 1948 to 1971, and the first part concludes with a brief yet critical look at the Windrush scandal and its impact on contemporary British society and politics.

The second chapter, titled 'A Woman Without Child is Like a Tree Without Fruit', is split into two sections. The first, 'Black Femininities', examines issues ranging from the financial versus familial priorities of women to the role of education in breaking socio-economic cycles. The second section, 'Black Masculinities,' delves into aspects such as the desire for power, the issue of absent fathers, and the systemic, gendered violence perpetuated by institutions.

Chapter Three, titled 'I am not Homosexual, I am Barrysexual', contains three subchapters. The focus here is on sexuality and desire, tackling subjects like heteronormative expectations within Black communities, racialized discourses around sexual entitlement, and the complexities of relationships that challenge conventional norms of gender, race, and marital fidelity.

The fourth and final chapter, 'A Terrific Instinct for Middle Class Mores,' consists of three subchapters that scrutinise social class and mobility in connection to Caribbean heritage and, of course, race. Here, the text confronts stereotypes of Black affluence, assesses the ongoing impact of transgenerational poverty, and

⁴ The 'third mission' refers to the academic endeavour to extend research impact beyond scholarly circles, targeting broader societal challenges such as social inequality, cultural understanding, and community engagement.

critically examines the assumption that poverty can sometimes serve as a social equaliser among different (minority) ethnic groups.

The conclusion then succinctly synthesises the key findings in relation to the initial research question, thereby tying the thematic threads together. In addition, it revisits the broader significance of the present thesis within the context of British literary and cultural studies. Similarly, the conclusion acknowledges this master's thesis' research limitations, offering possible avenues for future scholarly exploration.

Examining the (de)construction of gender, race, and class and the intersections thereof, the principal aim of this Master's thesis is to investigate the narrative surrounding the Windrush generation expressed through its own voice, i.e., through the use of literature written by it – or its descendants – as primary sources. In a similar vein, the principal theorists featured in this thesis are either Black British or Black American.

My primary aim is to show that the lives of the Windrush generation and their offspring – both in literature and in the real world – are multilayered, complex, and affected by a myriad of different factors. Much like ships navigating a shared course, their lives are not only intricately linked by a common cultural compass and heritage, but also bound by the collective struggle against the turbulent waters of institutionalised racism in Britain.

1. A life between islands

“Stirred by restlessness, pushed by history, I found myself in the centre of Empire.”

– James Berry, *‘Beginning in a City, 1948’* (2007: 78)

The story of the Windrush generation tells a devastating tale of Empire, of colonialism, of power, of race, of gender, of cruelty, of dignity, of survival and of an unparalleled capacity not only to withstand storms, but to thrive in them. Few other modern migration movements have had more significant and lasting effects on Great Britain: on, *inter alia*, its economy, its social composition and stratification, its political landscape, and its cultural production. The sheer complexity of intersecting factors presents a challenge for thorough exploration within the boundaries of this Master's thesis. Every historical thread and nuanced narrative, deeply embedded in the experience of this generation, exerts a lasting influence on the United Kingdom. Yet

amidst this intricate tapestry, one symbol consistently emerges that seems to be inextricably intertwined with the history of Black West Indians: ships.

The Windrush generation is named after a vessel which has attained cult status⁵ and is steeped in myth: The HMT Empire Windrush. This ship, carrying 492 citizens of the British Empire invited from the Caribbean islands to combat cataclysmic postwar labour shortages, is most famously associated with starting the Windrush saga upon arrival at Tilbury Docks, near London, in June 1948. In reality, however, it was not the first passenger-carrying vessel from the West Indies to touch British shores after the Second World War. Rather, two other vessels had already set the stage, notably the SS Ormonde, which reached Liverpool in March 1947 with 108 passengers onboard, and the Almanzora, which brought approximately 200 passengers when it docked in December of that same year (Lowe 2023: 3; National Archives 2023). However, looking at the broader historical backdrop, it is crucial to note that the origin story of Black immigration in Britain cannot solely be attributed to the arrival of the HMT Empire Windrush, the SS Ormonde, or the Almanzora. Rather, the relationship between the West Indies and Great Britain is perhaps best captured by a phrase that has become a cornerstone in Black British discourse, articulated in 2008 by Ambalavaner Sivanandan: "[W]e are here because you were there" (cit. in Eddo-Lodge 2019: 9; Sivanandan 2008; Zitterl 2019: 1). Sivanandan's statement elucidates the historical chain of events linking the Caribbean, Great Britain, and Africa through the framework of the Triangular Trade. It is through this trade system that the Black population, originating from Africa, first arrived in the West Indies. To truly grasp the depth of this generational journey, its origins must thus be traced back to a darker, more confined space: the bowels of slave ships, which brought with them a layered and complex history, unfolding over centuries and across oceans.

This part of the present paper serves to provide the contextual framework required for the analyses conducted in chapters 2-4 and is subdivided into three parts: In the first subsection, I delve into the United Kingdom's historical role — or rather, the role of the British Empire — in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the ensuing journey toward its abolition. The subsequent subchapter focuses on the years in which the Windrush generation's members immigrated to Britain, i.e., 1948-1971. More precisely, this part examines the legal, cultural, and political landscape with regards to Black individuals immigrating to or residing in the United

⁵ Notably, a replica of the vessel was used in the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics in London in 2012 (Rose 2022).

Kingdom during those years. Concluding this triad of historical exploration, I direct my attention to the consequences of the Windrush scandal. This last segment assesses the contemporary state of British society, comments on the scandal's aftermath and evaluates possible outlooks on the future of the Windrush generation.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade in Britain

A racial twist [was] given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery.

– Eric Williams (2021 [1944]: 4)

The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the enormous human tragedies it inflicted were not caused by a desire to do evil, but by something much simpler, much more common, and thus much more terrifying: greed. In the words of John Thornton, "the actual motivation for European expansion and for navigational breakthroughs was little more than to exploit the opportunity for immediate profits made by raiding and the seizure or purchase of trade commodities" (2012: 31). As European colonisers, led initially by the Portuguese in the late 15th century, ventured into the Americas, it quickly became clear that the success of their territorial expansion hinged on a sufficient labour force. Early efforts to enslave the indigenous populations were largely ineffective and short-lived: not long after the arrival of the colonisers, the numbers of native communities rapidly plummeted. The European illnesses that had crossed the Atlantic with the invaders swiftly and mercilessly decimated the native populations who had no immunity against the imported pathogens (Emmer 2021: 1). Concurrently, European settlers themselves were reluctant to move in large numbers to tropical climates, as their mortality rate under such conditions was alarmingly high. At the same time, demand for New World goods produced in the colonies such as coffee and sugar was skyrocketing in Europe. As a consequence, the European trading companies turned their gaze towards Africa, hoping to find Black slaves that could resist both European pathogens and tropical heat. The slaves purchased on the Atlantic coasts of the African continent were subsequently transported across the Atlantic and sold to plantation owners in the Americas. Thus, the Transatlantic Slave Trade was born.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade did not only transport slaves – often referred to simply as 'human cargo', thus stripping them of any humanity and dignity left –, but

also colonial goods such as, *inter alia*, cotton, tobacco, coffee, and sugar. It is also commonly referred to as 'Triangular Trade', a concept which, put simply, maps out an imagined triangle with vertices in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The underlying mechanism of this triangular trading model unfolded in three distinct phases: The initial leg involved the shipment of European goods to Africa. Various African rulers and merchants participated in this commerce, engaging in the enslavement and trade of individuals from as early as 1440 until roughly 1833. In exchange for captives, these African authorities obtained an array of European goods, including firearms, ammunition, alcohol, and factory-produced items like indigo-dyed textiles from India⁶ (Kobayashi 2013). The second segment of this triangle, also called the 'Middle Passage' (McKissack & McKissack 1995: 109), saw the forced transportation of Africans, now enslaved, across the Atlantic to the Americas and the Caribbean Islands. Concluding this triangular route, the final leg of the triangle involved the return journey to Europe, laden with products cultivated in the slave-driven plantations, such as cotton, sugar, tobacco, and molasses (Inikori & Engerman 1992). The factor that made this economic model so enormously effective lay in its capacity to generate profit at each vertex of the triangular route. Profit was generated at every stop, not just from the trade in goods and enslaved people, but also from the differential value of human life at different points on the triangle. In more concrete terms, the value of an enslaved person increased substantially from their initial capture in Africa to their eventual sale in the Americas, resulting in huge profit margins for slave traders.

Although the British were arguably the most influential colonial power overall, they were not the first to trade African slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. Before the 1520s, The Portuguese and Spanish empires sent African slaves first to Seville or the Canary Islands and then to Spanish colonies like Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, with each ship carrying up to 40 slaves. These Africans joined the already enslaved Native Americans. In 1518, Spain's king allowed direct voyages from Africa to the Caribbean, increasing the slave count per journey to 200-300 (Little 2023: 1-4). The British formally entered the Transatlantic Slave Trade through the privateer and slave

⁶ Founded in 1600 and disbanded in 1874, the East India Company (EIC) was a pivotal entity in the expansion of the British Empire in India. At its zenith, the EIC was the world's largest corporation by various metrics and even boasted its own military force, comprising approximately 260,000 troops – double the size of Britain's standing army at that period (Dave 2023: 3). Specialising in key commodities such as cotton, silk, indigo dye, and tea, among others, the company was responsible for half of global trade in the mid-18th to early 19th centuries (Farrington 2002). Consequently, the British Empire could engage in extensive trade, spanning from the Far East to Africa and across the Atlantic.

trader Sir John Hawkins, a figure who has since been recognised as 'the Pioneer of the English Slave Trade'. Establishing a slave-trading syndicate in 1554, Hawkins laid the foundation for what would become a significant commercial activity for the British Empire (Brock 1887). Such endeavours turned out to be extraordinarily lucrative, with up to a 60% profit margin, compelling Hawkins to author a book, *An Alliance to Raid for Slaves*, that documented the economic potential of the trade (Northrup 1994). Hawkins made his initial foray into slave-trading in 1562, capturing and abducting 300 Africans in the region now known as Sierra Leone and subsequently selling them in the Caribbean. In 1564, he undertook a second venture, this time utilising Queen Elizabeth's own ship, the *Jesus of Lübeck*. These early voyages set a precedent for further British slave-trading activities, indelibly shaping transatlantic economic and social relations (Morgan 2007). Hawkins's ventures highlight two important factors that characterise the entirety of the British slave trade: support from the highest echelons of society, notably the Crown and the Church of England (BBC News 2006), and pure economic interest.

The limited scope of the present paper does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the complex history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade within just one section. However, the valuable research provided by Emory University and Henry Gates allows me to portray its sheer magnitude at a single glance (Slave Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database 2023):

Flag of slave ship								
Destination	Portuguese	British	French	Spanish	Dutch	American	Danish	Total
Portuguese Brazil	4,821,127	3,804	9,402	1,033	27,702	1,174	130	4,864,372
British Caribbean	7,919	2,208,296	22,920	5,795	6,996	64,836	1,489	2,318,251
French Caribbean	2,562	90,984	1,003,905	725	12,736	6,242	3,062	1,120,216
Spanish Americas	195,482	103,009	92,944	808,851	24,197	54,901	13,527	1,292,911
Dutch Americas	500	32,446	5,189	0	392,022	9,574	4,998	444,729
United States	382	264,910	8,877	1,851	1,212	110,532	983	388,747
Danish West Indies	0	25,594	7,782	277	5,161	2,799	67,385	108,998
Europe	2,636	3,438	664	0	2,004	119	0	8,861
Africa	69,206	841	13,282	66,391	3,210	2,476	162	155,568
did not arrive	748,452	526,121	216,439	176,601	79,096	52,673	19,304	1,818,686
Total	5,848,266	3,259,443	1,381,404	1,061,524	554,336	305,326	111,040	12,521,339

Table 1: Number of slaves transported in the Transatlantic Slave trade from 1501 to 1866.

In this case, numbers say more than a thousand words: In the course of roughly four centuries, more than 12 million Black Africans were uprooted, abused, dehumanised, and exploited by European slave-trading nations for economic profit. Second only to the Portuguese, the British Empire was one of the most prolific slave-trading colonial powers in the world, accounting for roughly 26% – or more than a quarter – of the entire trade, with its most profitable destination being the British Caribbean. According to the United Nations, the transatlantic slave trade was not only the largest forced migration in history, but incontrovertibly also one of the most inhumane. This mass displacement of Africans to European colonies drastically altered the demographic makeup of the New World, and the legacy of this migration is still visible today (UN 2013: 3). As for its economic effects, there seems to be no conclusive data that could possibly comprise all profits made during that period. However, some scholars suggest that the Transatlantic Slave Trade was the primary economic motor that allowed for the Industrial Revolution to happen in the first place (Solow & Engermann 2004). Regardless of the extent of the indelible mark the Transatlantic slavery left on the

Empire's financial situation, it also established and legitimised a clear racialised social order that persisted for four centuries and can be summarised as follows: Whites were portrayed as powerful 'masters' on top of the food chain, while Black people were powerless slaves who found themselves at the very bottom of it.

Regarding the abolitionist movement in Britain⁷, it is widely recognised to have been initiated by religious groups and humanists. Notably, the English Quakers believed that slavery was un-Christian, while a few secular thinkers of the Enlightenment argued it was violating the rights of man (Wyman-McCarthy 2018). For instance, James Edward Oglethorpe, who served as the inaugural governor of the Province of Georgia⁸, was among the first to oppose slavery on the basis of Enlightenment principles. Through his "Georgia Experiment," Oglethorpe persuaded Parliament to prohibit slavery in the state beginning in 1735. Despite this early effort, the ban was overturned and slavery was reinstated in 1751 (Wilkins 2004: 93). In the course of the following century, there were several freedom suits that had an impact not only on the British legal system, but also on the public opinion. The most famous and significant ones include the *Somerset's Case* of 1772, had a lasting impact on the common law surrounding slavery in the English-speaking world and spurred the abolitionist movement (Moncreiff 2006: 85f.), as well as *Knight v. Wedderburn* (1778). In reaction to more and more Black British people being liberated, the plantocracy, a group largely composed of British sugar merchants, absentee planters, and colonial agents, established the London Society of West India Planters and Merchants to resist the abolition (Butler 1995: 8). Despite these efforts, the Slave Trade Act of 1833 banned Transatlantic slave trading, leading to full emancipation in 1838.

Although, as aforementioned, several voices within White British society did oppose slavery on religious or humanistic grounds, the sheer scale of the change that occurred suggests that such sentiments alone were insufficient to catalyse abolition – particularly when considering the substantial debt incurred by the British government to compensate former slaveholders. Some scholars, most notably W.E.B. Du Bois, offer a more critical assessment on the British abolitionist movement:

The rise of liberal and philanthropic thought in the latter part of the eighteenth-century accounts, of course, for no little of the growth of opposition to slavery and the slave trade; but it accounts for only a part of

⁷ For a more comprehensive analysis of the acts of Parliament that led to the permanent abolition of slavery in Britain in 1838, see chapter four of the present thesis.

⁸ Roughly equivalent to modern-day Georgia (US state).

it. Other and dominant factors were the diminishing returns of the African slave trade itself, the bankruptcy of the West Indian sugar economy through the Haitian revolution, the interference of Napoleon and the competition of Spain. Without this pressure of economic forces, Parliament would not have yielded so easily to the abolition crusade. [...] In Africa, British rule was actually strengthened by the anti-slavery crusade, for new territory was annexed and controlled under the aegis of emancipation. It would not be right to question for a moment the sincerity of Sharpe, Wilberforce, Buxton and their followers. But the moral force they represented would have met with greater resistance had it not been working along lines favorable to English investment and colonial profit. (Du Bois 2022 [1943]: 174f.)

Returning to the initial point made in this chapter, it is essential to stress that the Transatlantic Slave Trade was primarily an economic venture aimed at meeting unquenchable European greed. Consequently, Du Bois's assessment is both balanced and logical: While he does not discard the important role that philanthropy played in the abolitionist movement, he poses a crucial question: What move is the most profitable? In a shifting political and social environment, it seemed to serve the interests of the British Empire to switch tactics, freeing its former colonies and then bringing them back together in a union of independent states, known today as the Commonwealth. Seen through a critical, if not slightly cynical, lens, it seems hard to believe that a nation that had few scruples exploiting an entire race for centuries suddenly has a profound change of heart. In my reading, it is far more likely that a system driven by avarice would either collapse or adapt when it could no longer satisfy its original purpose: to fulfil the Empire's greed.

1948-1971: the Windrush era

Four hundred years of slavery and racism cannot be erased by a single piece of legislature. As revolutionary as the British Nationality Act of 1948⁹ might have been, granting all colonial subjects, that is, all 'Commonwealth citizens', the right to resettle to Britain, did in fact little to combat the prejudice that Black Britons were facing. It is interesting to note that while the conditions were vastly different, the government's primary motivation for inviting West Indians to the United Kingdom were eerily similar to those of slave traders: to boost the British economy.

⁹ For more information on the British Nationality Act of 1948, see chapter four of the present thesis.

The hypocrisy inherent to the British Nationality Act becomes apparent when comparing the British government's communication with the West Indies and the messages they spread in their own country. For instance, multiple prominent British companies actively sought employees directly from the West Indies. By the year 1956, London Transport was not only recruiting in Barbados but also providing loans to cover the migrants' travel expenses to Britain. Similarly, British Rail publicised job opportunities through the Barbados Labour Office, and the National Health Service beckoned West Indian women to travel to Britain for nurse training. However, details of these invitations from what was often referred to as the 'Mother Country' were not disclosed by the British postwar government (Olusoga 2019: 22), quite the contrary: it actively sought to establish a difference between 'old' and 'new' British citizens.

James Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary responsible for implementing the Act, presented conflicting messages about its implications. On one hand, he asserted that "colonised people [should] be regarded as men and brothers of the people in this country" (HL Deb. 11 May 1948: 393f; cit in Patel 2022: 59). On the other, he clarified that the change in legal terminology from 'British subject' to 'citizen' did not denote 'a person belonging to Great Britain' (HL Deb. 11 May 1948: 393f.; cit in Patel 2022: 59). Rather, non-White citizens were to be considered individuals owing allegiance to the King, consistent with the traditional definition of subjecthood prior to 1948. Ede explained that this linguistic shift was merely a nominal gesture to appease India, Pakistan, and Ceylon, which had transitioned from colonial territories to 'dominions in the Commonwealth empire.' Furthermore, he conceded that the term 'subject' was modified because it "unfortunately has the significance of being a member of a subject race" (HL Deb. 11 May 1948: 392; cit in Patel 2022: 59). Consequently, the legislation was marketed divergently: it led West Indians to anticipate improved living conditions without racial discrimination, while simultaneously reinforcing the belief among White Britons that they constituted the 'true' British race.

In British immigration discourse, White European workers were consistently framed as the 'ideal immigrants.' Governmental initiatives actively promoted their arrival, comparing it to the increasing numbers of 'coloured immigrants.' Patel aptly describes these policies as "a balance sheet, as it were, of white and non-white people flowing in and out of Britain" (2022: 63). George Isaacs, Labour Minister under Prime Minister Attlee, affirmed this preferential perspective, stating that European migrants were essentially "working their passage to British citizenship" (HC

Deb. 11 November 1948: 1721; cit in Patel 2022: 63). In stark contrast, West Indian immigrants were often depicted not as settlers but as transient labourers enlisted to aid Britain's post-war reconstruction. Accordingly, the reception accorded to those who opted for permanent residence was far from welcoming. Alec Douglas-Home, the Commonwealth Relations Secretary, grappled with the issue of limiting non-White immigration in a 1955 cabinet memorandum: "[I]t would presumably be impossible to legislate for a 'colour bar' and any legislation would have to be non-discriminatory in form" (Spencer 1997: 176). This indicates that while overtly racist legislation was untenable, there was a desire to curtail Black immigration through covert means. British policymakers eventually circumvented the issue by instituting financial and educational barriers, effectively limiting the accessibility of immigration routes to Britain for non-White communities.

In the early 1960s, Britain experienced a rapid influx of non-White citizens from the British Commonwealth. Official statistics from June 1960 estimated the minority ethnic population, encompassing African-Caribbean individuals, West Africans, and South Asians, at approximately 250,000. This number surged dramatically in 1961, doubling to around 500,000 over the subsequent two years. This increase was partially propelled by migrants rushing to arrive before the enactment of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962¹⁰ (Patel 2022: 75). Of this expanded population, just over half were of African-Caribbean descent. Despite being sought after for specific types of labour, they faced pervasive social and institutional discrimination. This animosity towards immigrants, even as the UK faced labour shortages, escalated throughout the 1960s. It culminated in the unexpected electoral win of Conservative politician Edward Heath in 1970, leading to the implementation of the 1971 Immigration Act¹¹. This legislation, effective from 1 January 1973, signalled the close of the Windrush era.

¹⁰ The regulation targeted immigration from all Commonwealth nations, with the exception of those possessing UK passports. Under the new rules, aspirant immigrants were required to secure a work voucher, which was allocated based on the individual's employment potential.

¹¹ In principle, non-White British and Commonwealth citizens settled in Britain by January 1, 1973, had the same right to remain as White patrias. This cutoff date, later invoked during the 2018 Windrush scandal, demarcated those who would receive settled status and indefinite leave to remain, provided they were ordinarily resident in Britain before the 1971 Act took effect on that date.

The scandal and its aftermath: Toward a more inclusive society?

While the Windrush generation and their descendants had faced numerous hurdles in the years following the 1971 Immigration Act, the so-called Windrush scandal of 2018 – which, in essence, is the reason this thesis exists in the first place – exposed a crisis that had been simmering under the surface for years. This calamity laid bare the extent to which systemic failings could lead to the displacement and disenfranchisement of individuals who considered Britain their home.

The scandal came to light when longstanding residents of Black British heritage, many of whom had spent their entire adult lives working and contributing to British society, suddenly found themselves facing potential deportation. These individuals were confronted with demands to prove their legal status, a challenge made insurmountable by the lack of proper documentation, which in turn was exacerbated – if not caused – by the Home Office's own actions. More concretely, in 2010, disembarkation cards dating back to the 1950s were destroyed, stripping thousands of people of the means to prove their legality (Newton Dunn 2018: 4; Zitterl 2019: 5). Essentially, the Home Office eliminated the very evidence that members and descendants of the Windrush generation needed to verify their status.

The groundwork for the discriminatory practices of the scandal was laid well before 2018. To provide a brief chronological overview: In May 2012, then-Home Secretary Theresa May initiated a 'hostile environment' policy, outlined in a *Telegraph* article, that co-opted private landlords, employers, and NHS staff into conducting immigration checks. This was followed by a largely ineffective and widely criticised pilot scheme in July and August of 2013, where vans in six London boroughs displayed billboards urging illegal immigrants to "go home or face arrest" (Taylor 2022: 5). By February 2014, a BBC Panorama investigation into cheating in English language tests among overseas students led to a draconian response from the Home Office, resulting in the wrongful expulsion of numerous students. The Windrush scandal was brought to public attention in October 2017 through the investigative work of Guardian reporter Amelia Gentleman¹², culminating in international condemnation of the Home Office's policies.

¹² Amelia Gentleman was awarded many awards for her outstanding work, such as the Paul Foot Award 2018 for her coverage of what was described as "the catastrophic consequences for a group of elderly Commonwealth-born citizens who were told they were illegal immigrants, despite having lived in the UK for around 50 years" (*Private Eye* 2018).

Amber Rudd, who was the PM Theresa May's Home Secretary when the scandal unfolded, appeared woefully underprepared for the unfolding crisis. She initially downplayed the scale of the problem and even turned down pleas to address the predicaments faced by immigrants from the Commonwealth (Newton Dunn 2018: 4). However, as public and media scrutiny reached a boiling point, Rudd had little choice but to step down, resigning on April 29, 2018 (Zitterl 2019: 5). This resignation led Downing Street to retract its initial stance, culminating in a public apology for the egregious oversight. Yet, even in the aftermath of this profound institutional failing, accountability remains elusive. This curious absence of consequence for those involved – apart, perhaps, from Amber Rudd and Theresa May – in the scandal raises pointed questions about the extent to which systemic prejudices are not only entrenched but also institutionally unacknowledged.

The limited progress made following the government's commitment to comprehensively reform the Home Office post-Windrush further underscores the issue. Although 30 reform measures were adopted as advised by Wendy Williams, the independent civil servant who investigated the scandal, the outcomes have been lacklustre. Home Secretary Suella Braverman revealed in January that three pivotal commitments aimed at independent scrutiny had been scrapped. Moreover, the dedicated Home Office team overseeing this transformation was formally disbanded in September 2023 (Gentleman 2023). According to the most recent official review in February, only eight of the 30 proposed reforms were fully enacted, 13 were partially realised, and nine were either neglected or discontinued. This includes an incomplete assessment of the contentious 'hostile environment' legislation. Thus, while the Home Office professed commitments to addressing structural racism and inequality concerning the Windrush generation, these efforts waned almost instantly once media attention subsided.

The Windrush Scandal caused a political earthquake: Flooding the United Kingdom's media landscape with reports of British citizens losing their jobs, facing homelessness, deportation, and even death due to losing access to NHS services (Gentleman 2018), this crisis pointed to an arguably much bigger one: Britain's colonial past was starting to catch up with it. After all, the majority of the United Kingdom's past and current migration, particularly from (former) Commonwealth countries, can either directly or indirectly be traced back to the colonial mission and the deep-rooted racist beliefs associated with it.

Drawing from the severe societal and political implications of the Windrush Scandal, it becomes glaringly evident that Britain's colonial history is far from a mere relic of the past; rather, it continues to shape the lived experiences of its Black and West Indian citizens. This thesis seeks to shed light on this intricate intersection of past and present. Literature, in this context, serves not merely as a repository of these lived experiences but also as an active agent shaping the socio-cultural fabric and giving voice to the marginalised. Analysing, interpreting and contextualising works by Bernadine Evaristo, Andrea Levy, and Zadie Smith – each deeply connected to the Windrush generation –, this paper adopts an intersectional feminist lens to navigate the complex terrains of class, race, and gender. Ultimately, the present thesis seeks to contribute to a critical and nuanced cultural discourse surrounding a topic that remains both urgently contemporary and deeply rooted in historical context.

2. “A woman without child is like a tree without fruit”: Gendered expectations

Markers of difference such as skin colour, gender, (dis-)ability, and class are not only a quintessential part of social identity, but also elicit various societal and cultural expectations. This has far-reaching consequences: For instance, according to a policy brief published by the OECD Development Centre, discriminatory gender stereotypes contribute to the fact that women spend significantly more time on unpaid care work than men, which in turn is linked to lower rates in labour force participation, lower wages, and lower job quality (Ferrant, Pesando, Nowacka 2014: 1). In other words, gender is a critical, if not decisive, factor with regards to the unremunerated care work a person does, which, given that women are traditionally expected to put a significant amount of energy and time into it, substantially affects their socioeconomic position.

Gendered expectations differ greatly when viewed in combination with other markers of difference: They create completely new layers of identity and novel forms of discrimination that are, in theory, unique to a certain group of people. In her 2016 TED talk “The urgency of intersectionality”, Kimberlé Crenshaw illustrates why it is simplistic to reduce social identities to the sum of identity markers, such as [White] + [women] or [Black] + [woman]. Using Emma Degraffenreid’s unsuccessful lawsuit

against General Motors in 1976 as an example, Crenshaw argues that the law refused to protect Black women “simply because their experiences weren’t exactly the same as white women and African American men [sic]” (2016: 7:40-7:54). In other words, a group of people was structurally marginalised because their particular social identities as Black women did not fit into the current legal system and could thus not be fully captured by it. Consequently, the established framework was unable to identify the discrimination they faced and consequently failed to protect them against it.

Institutionalised discrimination on the basis of race, often in combination with other markers of difference, is something that British citizens who came from the West Indies as well as their descendants experienced (and, in some cases, continue to experience) on a daily basis. In this chapter, I delineate how Evaristo, Levy and Smith depict the gendered societal blueprints that (the descendants of) the Windrush generation are expected to follow. This part of the thesis uses the intersection of gender¹³ and its intersection with race as an organising principle, with one section on Black women and the other of Black men. In my analysis of the expectations of Black femininities, I focus on the perceived dichotomy between motherhood and career, education and the significance of the domestic sphere. Regarding Black masculinities, I concentrate on power, transgenerational parental trauma and institutionalised violence.

Black femininities

“Ain’t I a Woman?” – Sojourner Truth

Early feminist movements were rarely concerned with Black women. According to bell hooks, first and second wave feminism primarily catered for White, (presumably) heterosexual, middle and upper class women while overlooking or even actively ignoring the needs of the most marginalised groups (2015 [1981]). The initial step towards equality was recognising that Black women existed in the first place. While Black women have always been a part of history, their underrepresentation in media

¹³ I wish to point out that despite the fact that this subchapter is divided according to only two genders, I do not support gender binarism. The reason for this is that the works by Evaristo, Levy and Smith that I have chosen as primary objects of analysis do not feature queerness with regards to gender identity, but only with regards to sexuality. I advocate a pluralistic, inclusive view of gender identities that is not restricted by binary models.

discourse meant that they held a minimal presence within the collective consciousness pertaining to 'the Blacks'. According to Nell Irvin Painter, up until the mid-19th century, Black slaves were almost exclusively represented as male, which effectively erased the existence of Black women from public conscience. Early Black women's rights activists such as Sojourner Truth "embodied a fact that still bears repeating: Among the blacks are women, among the women, there are blacks" (Painter 1996: 4). Societal changes from the mid-19th century to the present have shaped media representations. Yet, persistent disparities related to gender and race remain: For instance, Black women continue to experience a significant underrepresentation in media outlets, a trend that resonates with historical patterns of marginalisation (Sullivan 2018: 1). Still a marginalised group, women of colour are in the focus of this chapter. It explores how Evaristo, Levy, and Smith, whose personal backgrounds are closely linked to the Windrush generation, portray their lives in Britain.

A clash of interest: the choice between children or cash

*plenty woman round here don't get husbands
they just get babies (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 19)*

Black motherhood, particularly in combination with poverty, is a recurring theme in all three novels that serve as objects of analysis in the present thesis, but perhaps most notably in Smith's *Swing Time* (2016). Although the unnamed protagonist does not have children herself, the topic is omnipresent: in her relationships with her Jamaican-born Mother¹⁴, with her former best friend turned foe, Tracey, and even with her boss, White popstar Aimée. It is worth noting that whereas motherhood seems to bring joy to the White, enormously rich Aimée, it is a burden for both the narrator's mother and Tracey, whose lives are visibly encumbered with the duties of the role. Given that the current subchapter examines the lives and experiences of Black women, it will prioritise the motherhood narratives of Mother and Tracey, while largely excluding Aimée's perspective. In *Swing Time*, being a West Indian mother is not only portrayed as an obstacle to career advancement and, ultimately, to making money, but most importantly to women's needs as well as their freedom. Sacrificing

¹⁴ To avoid the formulaic expression 'the narrator's mother', I will refer to this character from Smith's *Swing Time* (2016) as 'Mother' throughout the present thesis.

the Black mother's dreams outside the domestic space is portrayed almost as a prerequisite for her to fulfil the expected role. One of the protagonist's monologues reveals what these motherly obligations supposedly entail:

What do we want from our mothers when we are children? Complete submission. Oh, it's very nice and rational and respectable to say that a woman has every right to her life, to her ambitions, to her needs, and so on [...] but [...] all you want from your mother is that she once and for all admit that she is your mother and only your mother, and that her battle with the rest of life is over [...] And if she doesn't do it, then it's really a war, and it was a war between my mother and me. (Smith 2016: 18)

As a child, the protagonist – who is an only child – wants Mother for herself. However, I argue that there are more layers to this obsessive desire than the needs of an offspring: The monologue reads less like a desperate call for love and attention and more like the attempt to establish dominance in Mother's life by reducing her to a domestic role. Smith does not only depict the child's selfish desire to own and control Mother, but she alludes to a much bigger conglomerate of societal expectations piled onto the shoulders of Black mothers. According to Melvin Wilson, who researches contextual processes and outcomes in low-income, ethnic minority families, Black women are, in the vast majority of cases, made not only partially but fully responsible for managing the household and raising the children, often in addition to their jobs outside the home (1995: 9f.). In addition, women, regardless of race and occupation, are generally more likely to do the lion's share of labour in the home (Bianchi et al. 2012; Coltrane 2000; Fuwa & Cohen 2007). Thus, they often experience the phenomenon that Arlie Russel describes in her eponymous work *The Second Shift* (1989), namely that in addition to their paid work in the public sphere, women are also expected (or even forced) to perform the majority of labour in the domestic one. This gendered imbalance is aggravated by the fact that mothers in general (still) spend substantially more time caring for (their) children than fathers (Craig 2006; Marshall 2006; Raley, Bianchi and Wang 2012). Consequently, the protagonist's wish to force Mother to sacrifice her identity by relinquishing her own ambitions and needs for her family is likely not only a symptom of childish possessiveness, but also a reflection of a societal imperative to 'put Black mothers in their place'.

Mother, however, refuses to conform to these gendered preconceptions and stereotypes. Although the protagonist largely confines her to the role of motherhood, she strives to transcend this limitation, thus creating an identity outside of it. This is evident in her endeavours, such as pursuing higher education and venturing into

political office despite living in a country where she is consistently viewed as 'the other'. In my interpretation, this profound sense of otherness and identity loss is underscored by her name, which speaks through its absence. According to Sacks, this phenomenon is "an increasingly familiar trait in the fiction of exile, in which migrants [...] simply lose their names in transit, like misplaced luggage" (2015: 7). He further argues that if the character "has no proper home, he can also have no proper name" (2015: 6). I would add to this that through her namelessness, the West Indian Mother simultaneously eludes categorisation and provides a gap of information that allows the readers to insert their own stories and identify with the character on a more profound level. Although Mother's name is never revealed, her story and her unquenchable thirst for freedom, bodily autonomy and self-determination are relatable. Yet, Mother's defiance of the societal blueprint she is supposed to follow causes a great deal of frustration for the protagonist, and she consequently faces the judgement her family and society pass on her:

My earliest sense of her was of a woman plotting an escape, from me, from the very role of motherhood. I felt sorry for my father. He was still a fairly young man, he loved her, he wanted more children – it was their daily argument – but on this issue, as on all things, my mother refused to budge. Her mother had birthed seven children, her grandmother, eleven. She was not going back to all that. She believed my father wanted more children in order to entrap her, and she was basically right about that, although entrapment in this case was only another word for love. How he loved her! (Smith 2016: 18f.)

Mother recognises how this version of motherhood has shackled generations of Black women before her and refuses to repeat the transgenerational pattern (passed down to her through her mother and grandmother) of yielding to the needs and desires of others. Just a few pages later, when visiting Uncle Lambert living in poverty in South London, the protagonist shares that "[...] my mother left home to escape all that, so that no daughter of hers would ever become a child with a child, for any daughter of hers was to do more than just survive – as my mother had – she was to thrive" (Smith 2016: 22). Put differently, Mother is working hard to break the cycle that connects (young) Black motherhood to poverty, lack of education, and, ultimately, lack of socioeconomic opportunity. It is worth noting how, in the quote above, Smith purposefully contrasts the words 'survive' and 'thrive'. The difference between the two is much more than purely linguistic: Following Mother's line of reasoning, the protagonist is left with but two choices: Either she excels at life or she is bound to fall back into the pattern Mother worked so hard to break.

Hard work, dedication and obstinacy do not protect Mother from her daughter's harsh criticism: Despite having profited from Mother's resistance, the protagonist takes her – notably White – father's¹⁵ side by making his repeated attempts to impregnate and entrap Mother against her will seem harmless and her resistance unwarranted. However, what the biased protagonist, who is also the first-person narrator, portrays as benign acts committed out of Father's desperation over his unrequited love are, in reality, profoundly sexist: He is exerting what is commonly referred to as 'reproductive coercion', a form of gender-based violence that interferes with Mother's reproductive autonomy and reinforces a power imbalance between the two (Grace & Anderson 2018: 372; Connell 1987). Violence is never born out of love, which is also the case here: Smith describes that Father feels threatened by his partner's intellectual superiority and ambition and is afraid she might leave him (Smith 2016: 19-21). Thus, he strives to inscribe himself permanently into her life by forcing her into the role of a parent and, consequently, wife. In my reading, it is thus not an unfulfilled reproductive desire that drives Father to coerce Mother into having more children. It is primarily a will to power combined with the fear that without children, his presence will become redundant and he will lose control over his partner.

Reproductive coercion is also present in the life of Tracey, who embodies Mother's greatest fears about single Black motherhood. Tracey really ticks all the boxes: She comes from a low-income single-parent household with a White alcoholic mother. Her abusive Black father, whom Tracey idolises as one of Michael Jackson's background dancers, only very occasionally makes an appearance. Later in the novel, it is revealed that she still lives in her childhood apartment, now with three children by three different fathers of three different races, all of whom are equally absent. Because of these tremendous differences, Tracey seems to serve as a foil character to both Mother and the protagonist: Unlike the former, she seems to be repeating the transgenerational pattern – which one might pointedly call a 'curse' – of poverty and Black motherhood. When the protagonist visits Tracey near the end of the novel, the single mother even addresses the issue directly: "Funny, innit [...] Rich birds with no kids, poor birds with plenty. Sure your mum would have a lot to say about that." (Smith 2016: 405). Unable – or unwilling – to see the structural issues behind her current condition, Tracey directs her resentment towards the woman who,

¹⁵ To avoid the formulaic expression 'the narrator's father, I will refer to this character from Smith's *Swing Time* (2016) as 'Father' throughout the present thesis.

notwithstanding her upbringing in a comparably impoverished and turbulent environment, managed to break the vicious cycle she herself is still trapped in: the protagonist's mother.

Although Tracey has a name, I argue that her character does not solely represent an unfortunate personal situation, but stands in for a much larger social issue that disproportionately affects the Windrush Generation and their descendants: Lone parenthood in combination with poverty. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2019 published by the Office for National Statistics in 2021 showed that 63% of Black Caribbean and 43% of Black African kids in Britain were living in lone parent families, which, in the vast majority of cases, means they were living with their mothers. The statistics are similarly dire for brown, or mixed-race, children. As a comparison, this was only the case for 32% of White Irish and 19% of White British children (ONS 2021c). Given that single parent families usually dispose of only one income, they are prone to being poorer. Thus, it is saddening but hardly surprising that a considerable share of Black children in the United Kingdom grow up in poverty: 30% of Black Caribbeans and 45% of Black Africans (Palmer & Kenway 2007: 5). Tracey is much more than an isolated case of a Black woman whose life seems to have been derailed through: she embodies and represents these harrowing statistics. Apparently unable to escape the fate which is linked so deeply to her race and gender, she is doomed to repeat it.

Breaking the cycle: education as a tool for female liberation

Living life as black women requires wisdom because knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions has been essential to [our] survival [...] [We] cannot afford to be fools of any type for Other objectification as the Other denies us protections that white skin maleness and wealth confer. – Patricia Hill Collins (2002: 257)

At first glance, it seems logical that the protagonist of Smith's *Swing Time* should serve as a good example, particularly in comparison to Tracey: She has, at least for most of the novel, a secure job, is childfree and, perhaps most importantly, highly educated. The reality, however, is much more nuanced: By the end of the novel, the protagonist seems neither emotionally fulfilled nor financially stable and looks at an uncertain future. The protagonist serves as an illustration of why education,

particularly for members of the Windrush generation, does not automatically guarantee a secure lifestyle. Nevertheless, her situation, although profoundly influenced by her gender, race, and class, is vastly different from that of her Jamaican-born mother. While the protagonist might not have been able to attend the most prestigious British universities, she was still able to profit from academic opportunities Mother only dared to dream about and which she pursues later in life. Even on her deathbed, she talks about the importance of education:

I was just a student, I am studying, because you have to learn to survive, and I was a mother and I have to learn, because you knew that any of us they caught reading or writing faced jail or a whipping or worse, and anyone caught teaching us to read or write got the same, jailed or whipped [...] we were taken out of our time and place, and then stopped from even *knowing* our time and place – and you can't do anything worse to a people than that (Smith 2016: 452; italics original)

Mother clearly sees education as the lifeline that propels her out of the poverty in which she grew up and allows her to achieve at least some degree of self-determination. However, while education is widely acknowledged to present an array of professional and personal opportunities for individuals across various ethnicities, it does not provide them in equal measure. Regarding the statistical differences in college entry rates based on race, with White people being almost twice as likely to start a university degree, Thomas B. Edsall states that “[e]ducation lifts all boats, but not by equal amounts” (2021: 6). This assertion is backed up by statistics. According to an analysis of data from the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey by the Trades Union Congress, Black employees earn, on average, almost a quarter less than their White peers (cit. in Eddo-Lodge 2019: 208). The data indicates that education does little to protect Black British employees from racism in the labour market, quite the contrary: the racial pay gap widens in accordance with education: up to GCSE level, Black people were paid 11% less, up to A-levels they received 14% less and Black university graduates received a substantial 23% less pay than their White counterparts (cit. in Eddo-Lodge 2019: 208). Both academia and the employment sector arguably present an even graver situation for Black British women, as they encounter hindrances unique to their experience, that is, at the crossroads of race, class, and gender (Showunmi 2023: 10). In a nutshell, while education generally improves chances and quality of employment, it does not shield the Windrush generation, nor their descendants from racist discrimination. Rather, it exposes that systemic racism, ingrained in the very

fabric of British society, affects the educational sector and the labour market, quietly shaping outcomes and restricting access to success.

The challenges that West Indian immigrants faced and continued to face in everyday life are also portrayed in Levy's *Small Island* (2004): Hortense, the mixed-race wife of Gilbert, is a highly educated Jamaican teacher who believes that both her light complexion and her academic training will protect her from any harmful racist encounters. Yet, in the midst of her daily routines, like grocery shopping, she swiftly discovers a contrasting reality that challenges her beliefs about her position in the so-called 'Mother Country':

"A tin of condensed milk, please," I asked him.

But this red man stared back at me as if I had not uttered the words. No light of comprehension sparkled in his eye. "I beg your pardon?" he said.

Condensed milk, I said, five times, and still he looked on me [sic] bewildered. Why no one [sic] in this country understand my English? At college my diction was admired by all. I had to point at the wretched tin of condensed milk, which resided just behind his head.

"Oh, condensed milk," he told me, as if I had not been saying it all along. (Levy 2022 [2004]: 331f.)

Hortense is clearly not yet aware that the cultural and linguistic differences between Jamaica and the United Kingdom are significant enough to hinder communication and even, as is the case in this example, prevent mutual comprehension. The grocer's behaviour, while not overtly or intentionally racist, underscores the profound discrepancies in language and culture between the 'Mother Country' and the West Indies. Notably, Hortense's academic preparation failed to equip her with this crucial understanding. Instead, she was given the impression of speaking 'proper English' and thus experienced a culture shock when she struggled to communicate. While Hortense had experienced racism before, for instance when applying to the Church of England school in Kingston (Levy 2022 [2004]: 86), her relatively light complexion had apparently afforded her more privileges than challenges in her native Jamaica, even when interacting with White people. This is not an isolated experience. Windrush generation member Derrick Burton explains his confusion upon being discriminated against in public places such as schools: "I didn't know what racism was until I came here. I was brought up in a white school in Jamaica, and I never had a problem" (Burton & Symonds 2023: 19). Both Burton's account and Levy's novel not only demonstrate that racism is inherently a structural issue, but also underscore that educating minorities to meet societal expectations does not yield a

comprehensive remedy. This is further exemplified when Queenie, another character in *Small Island*, belittles Hortense in a well-intentioned yet inappropriate and condescending attempt to teach her English: “Mrs Bligh was a punctilious teacher. The shop with meat in the window she tell me is a butcher. [...] I tell her, “I know, we have these shops in Jamaica.” She nod. She say good. Then seeing a shop selling fish she tell me this is a fishmonger” (Levy 2022 [2004]: 332f.). In spite of her good intentions, Queenie falls into the White saviour narrative¹⁶ by failing to recognise Hortense’s intelligence, skill, and familiarity with the English language. Hortense’s discrimination is obviously not due to her education (or lack thereof), but rather results from being a Black woman in post-war England. Her story not only represents her generation but epitomises the complex interplay of race, gender, and class, thereby exemplifying the very principle of intersectionality and unveiling the subjacent issues of societal bigotry in Britain.

West Indian women between the private and the public sphere

The post-war era in Britain was a period of profound change: New cultural norms were emerging as a result of elementary changes in the societal fabric. Work that had traditionally been performed by White men was now done by women and immigrants, seeing that due to the many casualties of the Second World War, there was an enormous labour shortage (McDowell 2018: 4). Despite Britain’s urgent need for workers the Windrush generation did not receive a warm welcome. The chilly reception created a profound culture shock for West Indians, made even more disorienting by the stark contrast between their expectations, based on idyllic narratives of the ‘Mother Country,’ and the harsh realities they faced upon arrival. This sentiment is best expressed in Levy’s *Small Island* when Gilbert likens England to a once-cherished relative:

The filthy tramp that eventually greets you is she. Ragged, old and dusty as the long dead. Mother has a blackened eye, bad breath and one lone tooth that waves in her head when she speaks. Can this be that fabled relation you heard so much of? [...] She offers you no comfort after your journey. No smile. No welcome. Yet she looks down at you through

¹⁶ The so-called White Savior Complex (WSC) is a narrative trope or mentality in which a White individual rescues people of colour from adversity, criticised for perpetuating racial stereotypes and overshadowing the experiences of those being ‘saved’. For more information, see, for instance, Teju Cole 2012, and Amy C. Finnegan 2022.

lordly eyes and says, “Who the bloody hell are you?” (Levy 2022 [2004]: 139.)

Gilbert’s impression likely was shared by many members of the Windrush generation. Essentially, they “came to post-war Britain at the invitation of the government of the day to answer a severe labour shortage” (Dearden 2018: 3), but were treated like unwanted illegal immigrants. In other words, while many Britons did not mind profiting from their fellow-subjects’ work in the colonies, they became territorially defensive and openly hostile when those same individuals arrived, as a result of the government’s invitation, to address Britain’s post-war labour shortage. The public’s reaction to the arrival of the Windrush generation can thus only be described as a stark illustration of hypocrisy.

The situation was particularly complex for West Indian women who migrated to the United Kingdom: Striving to adapt to societal expectations of their new homeland, the Black women of the Windrush generation found themselves navigating complex terrains both within and outside of the home (and identity) they were building. Traditionally, Black women would be expected to perform domestic duties and stay in the private sphere¹⁷, but moving to Britain seemed to open career paths for them. Sir Lenny Henry recounts that, “[m]y mother was the pioneer of our family. She arrived in the UK with very little money but with a heart full of ambition and dreams. She did three jobs, found somewhere to live and arranged for the rest of the family to make that same trip (cit. in Oppenheim 2018). Similarly, Hortense in Levy’s *Small Island* dreams of teaching at a posh, White school. However, her ambitions are cut short twice due to racist discrimination at the possible future workplace: Once, in Kingston, because of her heritage: “His conclusion – although no word on the matter passed between us – was that my breeding was not legitimate enough” (Levy 2022 [2004]: 86) and a second time, in England, because her Jamaican credentials are not recognised: “The letters don’t matter [...] You can’t teach in this country. You’re not qualified to teach here in England” (2022 [2004]: 454). Hortense’s request for more information so that she may retrain is simply ignored. Thus, upon closer inspection, the glass ceiling she strives to shatter turns out to be made out of solid, unyielding concrete. Essentially, Hortense is left with two choices: Either she sells herself under her worth, seeing that she is barred from performing the job she trained for, or she lets herself be pushed back into the private sphere.

¹⁷ For more information on Black women and the private sphere, see chapter two of the present thesis.

Not all Windrush women share the same dreams of entering the public sphere. For instance, Antigua-born Carmel from Evaristo's *Mr Loverman* (2013) does not have any career ambitions whatsoever. Despite her being academically gifted, she focuses exclusively on finding a suitable husband and perfecting the art of marriage before 'escaping' to England in 1960:

at Antigua Girls' High you was top girl in your class for Latin and French, second for English and History, fourth in Classical Civilizations, fifth in the Ancient Greek Language, until you met Barry and realized [sic] that he was clever enough for both of you
everybody knows you can't be too clever or you won't catch man
Mommy barely said a word to you for ages when you stopped goin' school (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 23)

As can be seen in this excerpt, Carmel, ignoring her mother's concerns and disregarding her advice, advocates a highly traditional form of union. Becoming a housewife – preferably to a wealthy man –, a role in which she can completely devote herself to the fulfilment of domestic duties almost seems like a status symbol. Consequently, Carmel aspires to spend her life primarily in the private sphere, which revolves, in her case, around chores, children, and church. Her plan, however, does not quite unfold as expected in a number of ways. Perhaps most significantly, she, like a disproportionately high number of other Black British and Black Caribbean mothers (Watson et al. 2019), suffers from perinatal depression after the birth of her second and last child, Maxine, in 1970:

you is a disgrace, lady [...]
but when Barry sticks that *succubus* in your arms, bawling for your teats and wriggling its fingers greedily, wanting to suck the life force right out of you and you can't wait to dump her right back in the pink wooden rocking cradle [...] (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 23)

While both Carmel's experiences and her dreams differ from Hortense's, they are just as representative of the struggles of the female members of the Windrush generation: In the United Kingdom, Black women experience perinatal depression at a rate 13% higher than their counterparts (Watson et al. 2019), while concurrently displaying a lower tendency to pursue assistance when affected (Edge 2006: 379). Dawn Edge mentions a variety of reasons that prevent Black British mothers from seeking the help they require, such as "social, structural and personal barriers", difficulty conceptualising perinatal depression", "social imperatives to minimise stress", "stoicism in the face of adversity" as well as "fears of engaging with mental health services" (2006: 379). Simply put, the threat Black British mothers face is

twofold: They are more likely to be affected by perinatal health issues in the first place while at the same time being less likely to access healthcare services. This is perhaps best exemplified in *Mr Loverman* (2013) when Carmel's husband Barry, the novel's protagonist, suggests asking for professional help. Carmel's retort displays many of the behaviours described by Edge:

he goin' make an emergency call to the doctor to take you in before you
really harm someone, but you shut him up with
over my dead body
and he could see you mean it, because last time was ten years ago, when
Donna was one month old, and he found you crying in the bath with a
knife [...]
no way are you going to allow a doctor to prod around inside your mind
because whatever is going on in there, nothing can make it right
ever.

(Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 74f.; italics and layout original)

Carmel's fear of engaging with mental health services is inconceivable to the degree that she would end her own life rather than go see a doctor. This sentiment is reflected both on the level of content and form, given Evaristo's stylistic decisions related to formatting. The phrase "*over my dead body*" is accentuated with italics, while the very last word, "ever", is positioned as a standalone, right-justified afterthought on a new line. In my reading, this formatting emphasises the enduring and ostensibly immutable nature of Carmel's mental health challenges. Ultimately, however, she is able to turn her life around, attending the Open University and receiving a degree in Business Administration. This allows her to enter the public sphere, working at Hackney Council and eventually becoming a Housing Manager.

While Carmel's pregnancy difficulties, mental health issues and struggles in the domestic sphere are representative of the hardships many Windrush mothers faced, her solution is not. Unlike the majority of immigrants from the West Indies, Carmel and Barry come from wealthy backgrounds and become even richer once they start investing in British real estate. Her class privilege thus affords Carmel the possibility to pursue a degree without any major difficulties, while most Black women, such as Hortense, live in areas with high levels of poverty and consequently lack access to resources that would allow them to change their lives as effortlessly and swiftly. Regardless, the accounts of Hortense's and Carmel's lives demonstrate that the women of the Windrush generation faced disproportionate amounts of obstacles – both in the private and in the public sphere.

Black masculinities

Black women were not the only members of the Windrush generation affected simultaneously by systemic racism and sexism: The complex experiences of the men within the Windrush generation in post-war Britain are just as eye-opening. They constitute a unique set of multifaceted narratives that offer insights on the struggles and types of discrimination particular to this demographic. Owing to their historical roots, both Black and intersectional feminism have a propensity to focus predominantly on women from ethnic minorities, thereby leaving the narratives of their male counterparts somewhat underexplored. This disparity has shaped a scholarly discourse in which the unique challenges Black men encounter, especially those at the crossroads of race, class, and gender, are arguably yet to receive full acknowledgement. This chapter seeks to redress this imbalance by focusing on three central themes regarding the Black male characters in Evaristo, Levy, and Smith: power dynamics, transgenerational fatherly absence, and institutionalised gendered violence. The aim of this subchapter is to shed light on these underrepresented narratives and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the Windrush generation as a whole.

Big phone, cracked screen: a desperate desire for power

Identity markers, including but not limited to race, gender, and class, often indicate a person's societal standing due to culturally created and fixed hierarchies that regulate access to power. The theoretical framework that informs this hypothesis draws from Raewyn W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt's concept of hegemonic masculinity. This 'ideal' form of manhood is not in direct binary opposition to subordinate masculinities, but rather exists on a continuum where subordinate masculinities are positioned in relation to this hegemonic standard. The two scholars explain the concept as follows:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men [...] Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved

through culture, institutions, and persuasion. (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005: 832)

In other words, hegemonic masculinity can be understood as a set of identity markers and behaviours that constitute the normative ideal of manhood in a society. It follows that the more a man corresponds to this ideal, the more societal privilege he is afforded. One important aspect to mention here is that this culturally created stabilisation of power relations is largely, if not exclusively, contingent upon its exclusivity. Building upon Connell's *Gender and Power* (1987), the text in which the term 'hegemonic masculinity' was coined, Mike Donaldson argues that it is intrinsically intertwined with heteronormativity, homophobia, misogyny and the radical exclusion of non-White men (1993), as confirmed by Kimmel and Ferber (2000). Consequently, Black men were categorically and invariably denied access to the comprehensive benefits afforded by hegemonic masculinity because of their race. Even in instances where they might be endowed with privileges of class – a rarity in most instances – this particular sphere of power remained inaccessible to them.

In the United Kingdom, this systematic exclusion of Black men from positions of power is clearly linked to the legacy of imperialism and colonialism: According to Bradley Deane, by the mid-19th century, the British imperial mission was undergoing a "masculinization" (2014: 12). This means, essentially, that the discourse around it had shifted to portray colonisation as an opportunity for men to prove their worth, achieve everlasting glory, and, perhaps most importantly, become as hegemonically masculine as possible. In his 1872 Crystal Palace speech, Benjamin Disraeli told British men that, "You must act as if everything depended on your individual efforts [...] Yes, I tell all who are here present that there is a responsibility which you have incurred to-day, and which you must meet like men" (1882 [1872]: 534f.). Disraeli shaped and amplified a discourse that equates being manly with participation – or more precisely, dedicating one's full energy – towards the maintenance of the Empire and the colonisation of novel territories. This gives rise to numerous implications: Most notably, within this specific context, it suggested that to validate one's merit as a White British man, there was a societal expectation to partake in the subjugation of non-Whites. In other words, racism was not only socially sanctioned, but even encouraged and portrayed as a natural part of the structural makeup of British culture. It is crucial to recognise the historical context of this discourse: Disraeli's speech was delivered a mere 76 years before the HMS Windrush docked in Tilbury. As I will demonstrate subsequently, the racist sentiments embedded in such

discourses did not merely vanish; they persisted well beyond that period. This enduring colonialist worldview not only made it challenging for Black men to ascend to positions of power but also constructed an ideal of masculinity that they could never fulfil.

These structural inequalities engendered by hegemonic masculinity led to a marginalisation and degradation of Black men, a condition often combated, albeit fruitlessly, through the display of overtly 'manly' behaviours. According to Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe, such acts may include but are not limited to demonstrations of aggression, violence, and sexual conquests (2009: 289) and are, in many cases, the consequence of feelings of inadequacy they experience when striving to meet White European standards of masculinity (Roberts-Douglass & Curtis-Boles 2013: 8). Black men are particularly likely to perform ostensible acts to prove their masculinity when, in addition to their masculinity being considered inherently inferior, they are unable to attain financial and social capital. As Lauren Wesley articulates, "[when] political and economic power is denied to some Black men, they often attempt to assert power where they can" (2015: 65). This phenomenon is perfectly exemplified by Bachir, who is an old acquaintance of Lamin, in Smith's *Swing Time*. Although Lamin and Bachir grew up in the same African village, their lives could not be more different: While the former is a teacher turned lover of popstar Aimée and is in the process of immigrating to Britain, the latter, as is later revealed, has been grappling with unemployment for the last three months. However, Bachir, wearing a dark blue striped suit too small for him and armed with a laptop, a tablet and a gigantic phone, pretends to be enormously successful. He has the following, notably exaggerated, reaction when he spots the protagonist's phone:

"This is *not* yours. Serious? This is yours?! This is what they are using in London? HA HA HA. Oh man, we more fresh over here! Oh, man! Funny, funny. I would not have expected this. Globalization, right? Strange times, strange times!"

"Which bank did you say you work for? asked Fern.

Oh, I got a lot going on, man. Development, development. Land here, land there. Building. But I work for the bank here, yes, trading, trading. You know how it is, brother! Government makes life *hard* sometimes. But show me the money, right? You like Rihanna? You know her? She got *her* money. Illuminati, right? Living the dream, baby."

[...] I noticed the screen on [his] laptop was black and cracked in several places. (Smith 2016: 374; italics original)

Instead of telling the truth or at least reacting in a humble, adequate manner, he attempts to position himself above the protagonist by ridiculing her mobile phone.

This is arguably facilitated by the fact he is interacting with a Black woman who, although she is of mixed heritage and thus has a slightly lighter complexion, could theoretically be a local. However, Bachir's behaviour changes notably when interacting with Fern, a Portuguese scholar who, despite his tanned skin, is clearly of European origin. Instead of debasing Fern, Bachir feigns busyness, tossing around nebulous business jargon like 'development' and 'trading', ultimately demanding that he be shown 'the money'. In addition, he mentions a conspiracy theory which seems to be popular among the village folk, namely, that any Black person who is successful must have connections to the Illuminati. Bachir does not only create his own rose-tinted story about his current situation through his business narrative, but he also outsources the responsibility for veritable success to the 'Illuminati'. Bachir is arguably trying to find a way to come to terms with the fact that he is at a systemic disadvantage that only very few Black men overcome – often helped by class privilege or sheer luck. If the Illuminati, who remain shrouded in mystery throughout the entire novel, are in charge of a person's fate, then said individual cannot be held accountable for their failure. This narrative, in my reading, protects him from facing the underlying issue, namely, that he is navigating a system designed for his failure, pursuing goals that were never authentically his.

Although Bachir does not exhibit any violent traits, he does fulfil one more cliché mentioned in Schrock and Schwalbe (2009): that of the womaniser. When the protagonist, in an attempt to compliment Bachir, tells him that he sounds American, he tries to shift the conversation by bragging about his love life:

"You know, I've not actually been to the US as yet, not as yet. Got a lot going on. It's all happening. Talking, talking, gotta keep up with technology, gotta keep relevant. Look at this girl: she is ringing my number, baby, night and day, day and night!" He flashed me an image on his tablet, of a beautiful woman with a glossy weave and dramatic lips painted a deep purple. It looked to me to be a commercial image. "These big-city girls, they're too crazy! [...] I need an upriver girl, I want to start a family. But these girls don't even want a family any more! They're crazy! (Smith 2016: 373 f.; italics original)

Bachir apparently struggles to be even slightly vulnerable: When conceding that his dream of going to the US remains unrealised, he swiftly diverts the conversation, spinning another web of lies, this time surrounding his ostensible conquest, to reinstate the façade of unassailable virility. Bachir's fabrication is remarkably similar to his initial deceit: He uses the image of a desirable woman, possibly taken from a commercial, to assert his sexual potency and appeal to his audience, yet

simultaneously discards his supposed lover for her reluctance to settle. The fault, he maintains, resides not with him but with the so-called 'big-city girls', whom he deems 'crazy' for their hesitation to start a family with him. Predictably, when Bachir discovers the protagonist's status as single and childfree, he makes an effort to convince her of the error of her ways. Then, he attempts to fashion himself as a viable romantic prospect who could come meet her in London:

And no babies? Not even married? No? OK! OK, OK... I feel you, sister, I feel you: Miss independent, is it? That's your way, OK. But for us, a woman without children is like a tree without fruit [...] You would love me, too. My oh my, you're gonna be thirty-three, girl! We should talk! Time flies. [...] Next time, in London, girl, in Babylon – let's talk! (Smith 2016: 374-376 f.; italics original)

While Bachir evidently lacks the means to visit the protagonist in London, he seeks to reinstate his masculinity by other means. Specifically, he invokes a cultural norm in an attempt to compromise her reproductive freedom¹⁸ to suit his desires to procreate. In essence, Bachir neither acknowledges his struggles nor confronts the structural inequities he faces. Instead, he perpetuates the very mechanism that underpins hegemonic masculinity: the subjugation of the 'Other', which, in this case, is a Black woman, to secure a position of power. Thus, Bachir – perhaps inadvertently and without apparent malice – perpetuates the violent hierarchy from which he suffers. However, in the fantasy he evokes, he is no longer merely the system's victim, but also acts as a perpetrator. Dismantling this control-dependent pattern proves virtually impossible within the hegemonic masculinity framework. A thorough reconceptualisation of Black masculinities, disentangled from elusive colonialist domination ideals, would be imperative. This would enable Black men to reshape the narrative from within, thereby potentially breaking the pernicious cycle of poor families, single mothers, and abusive fathers.

¹⁸ For more information on black women and reproductive freedom, see chapter 2 of the present thesis.

Transgenerational absence: of missing fathers

In their parenting role, [Black] men are viewed as verbs but not nouns; that is, it is frequently assumed that [they] father children but seldom are fathers.

(Coles & Green 2009: 9; emphasis original)

There is a societal narrative that reduces Black men to harmful stereotypes, the vast majority of which are either connected to sexual desire or violence. They are depicted as womanisers, as criminals, as sex symbols, as dealers, as prisoners, but hardly ever as emotionally mature, caring people. This story is reiterated by the British media: According to a report of the REACH media monitoring project, “close to 7 in 10 stories of Black young men and boys related in some form to crime” (2011: 2), with absent Black fathers named as a possible source for this ostensible propensity for violence. Put differently, a direct correlation is created between the absence of fathers and the violent tendencies of younger generations of Black men. While these portrayals oversimplify the issue, statistical data do reveal a higher incidence of non-resident fathers within Black communities: For instance, Black Caribbean fathers are significantly more likely to live apart from their children, being twice as likely as their White British counterparts and thrice as likely as British Asian fathers (Hunt 2009; Platt 2009). In other words, it is true that fatherlessness is a recurring topic in many Black British families and communities. Commenting on this narrative and its implications, British Caribbean artist Lanre Malaolu stated that, “[t]his conversation is hugely nuanced, but there is an element of truth to this narrative. Many young Black boys grow up without their fathers [...] [My father] wasn’t consistently present in my life, and I have felt a lot of resentment and rage because of that” (cit. in Morris 2021: 2-8). Yet, the issue presents considerable complexities. The primary factors contributing to men’s likelihood of leaving their families — namely unemployment, lack of education, and poverty — cut across all racial lines (Carlson & Berger 2013; Amato & Sobolewski 2004; MacLean & Eekelaar 1997). Moreover, for non-White individuals, racial inequalities add an additional layer to these shared challenges (Harper & McLanahan 2004: 369). However, there are some sources that contest the narrative of the absent Black father: For instance, Tracey Renolds is reluctant to equate nonresident Black Caribbean fathers with absent ones:

Historically denied access and opportunity to live up to this Western ideal of good fathering, the nonresident fathers, especially those with lower incomes, developed alternative roles and functions that guided their thoughts and expectations. Commonly expressed in these fathers' accounts was the importance of "being there" for their children and acting as a positive male role model for them. *Being there* was understood by the fathers in very general ways and involved making themselves available for their children (in person or by telephone), spending time with them, and providing emotional support to their children when needed. (Reynolds 2009: 18; italics original)

Acknowledging the historical dimension that contributes to this phenomenon, Reynolds paints a more nuanced picture of the issue. She demonstrates how class, race, and ethnicity intersect and influence the identity and, consequently, actions of these Black British fathers of Caribbean origin. While this does not justify, exculpate, or sanctify fatherly abandonment— or, in extreme cases, violence— it sheds light on the societal, cultural, and structural framework underpinning such behaviours.

Missing fathers are a prominent theme in all three objects of analysis of the present thesis, i.e., *Small Island* (2004), *Mr Loverman* (2013), and *Swing Time* (2016), but each novel highlights a different facet of the shared motif. In Levy's novel, Queenie, a White woman, has an affair with Michael Roberts, a Jamaican soldier. She is ultimately abandoned by him after he spends a few weeks in London and then returns to his home country. Following his departure, Queenie confronts a complex reality, driven by two unexpected turns of events: Michael leaves her pregnant, and her presumed-deceased husband, Bernard, unpredictably resurfaces three years post-war, just as she is on the brink of delivering her biracial child. With the child's father gone, Queenie sees no other choice but to give the child to her former Jamaican tenants, Gilbert and Hortense, given that post-war Britain is not welcoming to mixed-race children living with Whites:

"We can't look after him", was all I could think to say.

"Why not? Bernard asked. [...]"

"Because I don't know how to comb his hair, Bernard", I said.

"But that's ridiculous. We'll work something out. [...]"

"He's coloured, Bernard: I was crying. [...]" "You might think you can do it now [...] while he's a little baby saying nothing. But what about when he grows up? A big, strapping coloured lad. And people snigger at you in the street and ask you all sorts of awkward questions. Are you going to fight for him? All those neighbours... those proper decent neighbours out in the suburbs, are you going to tell them to mind their own business? [...] Are you going to be proud of him? Glad that he's your son?" [...]"

"Bernard. One day he'll do something naughty and you'll look at him and think, The little black bastard, because you'll be angry. And he'll see it in your eyes. You'll be angry with him not only for that. But because the

neighbours never invited you round. Because they whispered about you as you went by. Because they never thought you were as good as them. Because they thought you and your family were odd. And all because you had a coloured child!” (Levy 2022 [2004]: 520f.)

Levy illustrates a scenario where both mother and child grapple with various layers of discrimination and social exclusion due to the fact that they fail to adhere to societal norms: Beyond their modest economic circumstances, Queenie, under the mistaken impression that Bernard was deceased, unwittingly bears a mixed-race child outside of wedlock with a Black man. She is overwhelmed by despair as both she and her child will in all likelihood encounter a complex web of stigmas related to their economic situation, the violation of marital norms, and pervasive racial discrimination. In essence, the entrenched conservative, misogynistic, and racist ideologies of post-war Britain prevent mother and child from leading a normal, peaceful life.

While Michael, the absent father, arguably does not know about the pregnancy and can thus not be held entirely accountable, he was aware of the possible outcome of his intimate relations with Queenie as well as of the negative consequences this would have for her and any resultant child. Thus, both parents choose to engage in an activity that, given the social climate during that period, has the potential to destroy or significantly affect several lives. However, Levy’s portrayal of Queenie’s situation is made all the more captivating and significant because, despite the high stakes, it is not far from the truth. Statistics corroborate that such situations were not mere isolated incidents but, in fact, recurring phenomena¹⁹. Notably, Joseph Harker, the *Guardian*’s senior editor for diversity and development, experienced a situation reminiscent of Queenie’s, further highlighting that Levy’s portrayal is rooted in real-world scenarios:

My second father, who [sic] I call Dad, was a white dockworker who met my mum in Hull, east Yorkshire, when I was a toddler. She was Irish, a single parent and had a brown baby – three social stigmas in the 1960s. Dad was regularly reminded of this, in the crudest of ways, by his work colleagues: Hull was a city in which, at that time, outsiders of any kind were rare. (Harker 2019: 3)

Harker’s experiences mirror the discrimination Queenie feared in Levy’s narrative. However, he was born in a later era when British society, despite maintaining its misogyny and racism, had experienced certain shifts potentially – at least slightly – softening the circumstances for his parents. Yet, both Levy’s fictionalised narrative

¹⁹ For more information, see chapter 2 of the present thesis.

and Harker's real account show where the stereotype of the missing father comes from and how harmful it can be to the people, particularly the children, involved.

Evaristo's *Mr Loverman* provides a refreshingly different perspective on the issue because Barrington is a consistent presence in his children's lives, which contrasts with the stereotype of the absent Black father. While he does not participate in any household chores²⁰ whatsoever, he is a stable, dependable figure, particularly with regards to his daughters, Donna and Maxine. Not only does he share a home with his family but he also tries to provide financial and emotional support to his girls in various instances. Historically speaking, this, however, was, and arguably is, by no means the norm: Harker describes that in his youth, which is contemporaneous to the earlier events in Evaristo's novel, it was not the exception, but the rule for Black British and Black Caribbean fathers to leave:

[...] UK black culture was dominated by the Caribbean and, in particular, Jamaican identity. [...] [T]here was such an acceptance of this model of parenting; [...] somehow the menfolk could impregnate women and then disappear or, at best, play a minor, semi-detached role in their child's upbringing. (Harker 2019: 3;)

Although, in Evaristo's novel, Carmel and Barry are from Antigua and not directly from Jamaica, the cultural standards and practices appear to be fairly similar, given that he expects Carmel to be grateful given that "her man here is one of the good ones, because he been coming home to her bed for fifty years" (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 13). In other words, Barry seems to seek a reward for honouring what, at least from a White, Eurocentric point of view, would be considered the most basic terms of a marital agreement. Barry's entitlement and complacency are all the more surprising considering that he is gay and has been in a relationship with Morris for longer than he has known Carmel. In other words, he might not have abused his wife, but he has never been faithful either. Contrary to what one might expect, his sexual orientation is likely one of the primary reasons why he married her in the first place: being both homosexual and Black in Britain²¹ was – and is – dangerous, and his marriage possibly offered a plausible cover. However, I argue that the reason why he strives to be a good husband is rooted in a family trauma his mother sought to end:

My own mother's mother got chopped up by her second husband so bad [that] [s]he died from internal injuries before I born. My mother always drummed it into me, "Treat women good, yuh hear?" And that's what I

²⁰ For more information, see chapter 2 of the present thesis.

²¹ For more information, see chapter 3 of the present thesis.

been doing, never once laying a finger on my wife and staying around to raise my children. No way was I goin' create space in my wife's bed for some shady, step daddy character to sleep in the same house as Donna and Maxine.

No, sah, my girls was protected. (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 16)

In following his mother's advice and fulfilling her wish, Barry does more than merely uphold her words: He takes deliberate steps to dismantle a legacy of female-targeted violence and neglect that spans generations. This task is arguably eased by Carmel's affluence, which, while it does not erase racism, allows them to live comfortable lives and become highly successful after moving to Britain. Thereby, Carmel and Barry eliminate several risk factors connected to class – often intertwined with race – that tend to increase the likelihood of the father leaving or resorting to violence. This is an enormous feat, which becomes all the more poignant when juxtaposed to the path that Donna, their daughter, has chosen: Having been raised in a household that, though perhaps not perpetually joyful, was stable, and consistently supported by both maternal and paternal figures, she ironically chooses a partner who ultimately leaves her. In my reading, Donna's fate underscores that individual efforts, no matter how big, can never be a substitute for systemic change. In this case, Barry's own re-envisioning of Black masculinity and fatherhood might have a positive impact on his daughters, but does not change the fact that the norm is still shaped by values that portray resident fathers as weak.

Gangs and police: institutionalised gendered violence

The notable absence of Black fathers and the resulting neglect certainly are significant factors, if not catalysts, for violent behaviour among Caribbean British youth. However, this phenomenon is clearly facilitated by the systemic racism embedded within the fabric of British society. This is perfectly illustrated by the National statistics released by the Home Office, which show a stark racial disparity in arrest rates. More specifically, Black individuals are more than thrice as likely to be detained as White individuals. In numbers, it means 29 out of every 1,000 Black people find themselves under arrest, while this figure stands at only 9 for every 1,000 White people (Home Office 2022). Clearly, British law enforcement exhibits deep-seated racial disparities that make it even harder for young Black men to escape the vicious cycle of violence and poverty. However, the issue does not end there: In 2021, the Home Office claimed that, "Data also does not suggest that Black

men are more likely to die in custody in cases where use of force or restraint is present” (2021: 1.20). This statement was swiftly refuted by the National Police Chief’s Council the following year, which admitted that, “[...] we use our powers on Black people disproportionately often compared with White people” (2022: 29). Moreover, research from *Inquest* and *The Guardian* directly contradicts the Home Office’s 2021 assertion. They reveal that Black British people are “seven times more likely to die than White people following restraint by police”, even though they constitute only 7.5% of the total population (Dodd 2023: 2-5). Contrary to the Home Office’s 2021 claims, the numbers show a pattern which is as clear as it is concerning: namely, that systemic racism pervades British society and is prominent in one of its most sensitive areas: law enforcement.

Police violence against Black people in the United Kingdom is inextricably intertwined with, to put it in David Cameron’s words, “all-out war on gangs and gang culture” (Travis 2011: 2). This specific wording echoes the rhetoric of another influential Anglophone leader: Richard Nixon. His much-publicised ‘War on Drugs’ campaign in the United States was, as eventually confessed by his aide John Ehrlichmann in 1994, a thinly veiled racially motivated crusade to criminalise Black people. This initiative, ostensibly presented as a fight against narcotics, was later exposed as a stratagem designed to disproportionately target and disenfranchise racial minorities as well as the political left:

We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin and then criminalizing them both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night in the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did. (cit. in Taifa 2021: 2).

Put differently, the infamous ‘War on Drugs’ was, in reality, a war on racial minorities, particularly on Black communities. Unfortunately, Cameron’s and Nixon’s statements appear similar not only in phrasing, but also in content: Both appear to specifically target racial minorities. It is worth noting that in many predominantly White Western contexts, the term ‘gang’ has been problematically and stereotypically associated with culturally constructed signifiers of a racial ‘other’. To justify exerting control over said ‘other’, it is portrayed as a threat to social norms and societal order and, consequently, needs to be dominated:

Marking the ‘other’ – the ‘outsider’ – as violating social and moral boundaries is [...] a symbolic cultural code, according to which people and

groups may be included in society and become a 'deserving' member, or may be excluded and regarded as 'undeserving' [...] [T]his classification process leads to the designation of a host of penal, social and legal practices of control. (Ajzenstadt 2002; Agozino 2008; cit. in Ajzenstadt & Shapira 2012: 687).

In other words, there is a narrative portraying any non-Whites and particularly Black people in Britain as having criminal tendencies, which in turn is used to justify disproportionate and often violent regulatory practices. According to Patrick Williams, "the 'gang' label legitimises the over-policing of Black people and communities" (2015:18). While this mechanism arguably works similarly in both the US and the UK, the historical background is different and is worth considering: British imperialism produced narratives that stylised colonial subjects as less human and thus in need of external regulation by White Europeans. This is particularly true for collectives, seeing that, according to Ajay Skaria, non-Whites native to colonial territories "were attributed adjectives such as 'wild,' 'savage,' 'plundering,' or 'predatory,' and nouns like 'groups,' 'bands,' 'tribes,' 'races,' or even 'castes'" (1997: 729). The racist discourse surrounding non-White collectives soon found its way into law: in 1871, the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) was passed, which required that "any tribe, gang or class of persons" – first across Northern India, then nationwide – which was "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences" be registered (Criminal Tribes Act 1871, Section 2; cit. in Brown 2014). In essence, colonists predominantly targeted groups of young Indians based on their sex and gender. This strategy was arguably not predicated on the inherent violent tendencies of these groups, but rather aimed to maintain control by curbing potential resistance to colonial dominance.

The criminalisation of 'gangs' consisting of colonial subjects was by no means restricted to India: Similar narratives were created to describe the supposedly criminal activities of tribes in Somalia and Kenya (Whittaker 2015, Newsinger 2006, Nijjar 2018: 151), which in turn would be used to legitimise the torture, rape, and, in the most extreme cases, genocide. While draconian measures like the CTA have been relegated to history, the legacy of such laws persists: Even today, such racial prejudices find their way into official processes. The Metropolitan Police in London, for instance, maintains a gang violence matrix which lists the names and particulars of numerous individuals whom the police believe pose a risk of engaging in gang-related activities. Each individual is then assigned a score indicating their likelihood of involvement in such violence. It is hardly surprising to note that a significant portion of the individuals on this list belong to ethnic minorities. According

to Dr. Patrick Williams, some were put on this list based on their supposed acquaintances rather than their actions: “People are on there because of their associations, not because of their behaviours” (cit. in Dodd 2023: 8). The vast majority of names on the matrix pertains to (young) Black men without any criminal charges simply because they are Black and male. This is not only racism par excellence, but further reinforces racial inequality, seeing that “those on the matrix can be subject to punitive measures across the public sector, covering employment, housing, driving licences and education” (Dodd 2023: 7). In other words, several Black men were punished simply for existing. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, reevaluated the Met’s matrix, consequently removing a thousand young Black men who were deemed to present minimal or no threat. While Khan’s move is a commendable gesture, it only skims the surface and does not delve into the root causes that led to the formation of a racially skewed list to begin with.

The legacy of British colonialism and its accompanying narratives have profoundly influenced, and arguably continue to shape, the nation’s identity. As delineated in the preceding paragraph, this has significant adverse implications for individuals historically categorised as 'colonial subjects'. Britain during the mid-to-late 19th century was quite different from the nation it is today: The symbolic end of the Empire came in 1997 with the transfer of Hong Kong’s sovereignty to China (Brendon 2007: 660), which should have marked the end of the imperial mission, at least formally. Yet, according to Jasbinder Nijjar, “there is some continuity from the colonial to the postcolonial concerning the formal construction of racialized subjects as criminal collectives” (2018: 152). In essence, while it may be an overstatement to assert that contemporary British narratives around Black gang violence originate exclusively from its colonial history, this past undoubtedly continues to shape the cultural perceptions of racialised conflicts. This manifests itself not only in the prejudices many White people hold against Blacks, but in the fears that racial minorities, particularly former colonial subjects such as members of the Windrush generation, experience. This is perfectly illustrated in Evaristo’s *Mr Loverman* when Barry has to watch his sixteen-year-old grandson Daniel and thinks about his daughter’s concerns regarding gangs and violence:

You know, Donna’s biggest fear since Daniel born is that he will end up a statistic: gangs, stabbings, shootings and all of that stuff they do in the inner cities – stuff that would make Martin Luther King and those Civil Rights activists turn in their once segregated graves at how the enemy from without has become the enemy within; how murder by racist thugs

has been superseded by internecine fratricide; how if you live in certain parts of this country you fret your son won't reach adulthood. (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 191)

The portrayal of gang violence in this passage is particularly fascinating, namely as an 'enemy' from within: Although previously mentioned statistics show that Black men are three times more likely to be arrested than White men and seven times more likely to die in custody, Barry's primary concern is not the police but gangs. While this is a reasonable reaction considering that the protagonist remembers their relative Jerome Cole-Wilson who apparently died from gang violence, it is worth noting that he does not reflect upon the systemic issue that undergirds this phenomenon. In addition, it is interesting to note that Barry, who is usually very relaxed, struggles to keep his cool when his grandson asks to go out with his friends. Barry eventually does allow Daniel to spend the evening and better part of the night with his colleagues, but he nevertheless experiences fear:

My gut reaction is to tell him he can't go in case, well, in case he ends up *dead*. [...] Several times I think I hear the phone about to brrring [sic]. When it don't, I go into the hallway to check it's not off the hook, because maybe the police are trying to get through about Daniel, who might be goin' cold on a mortuary slab with marbling skin and a single slash across his throat. (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 192-194; italics original)

Even the typically composed Barry feels concern for his grandson, who faces increased risk simply because he's a young, Black male out at night. The consequences of this particular intersection of race and gender is evident: As highlighted earlier, this specific combination presents the greatest vulnerability to police interactions as well as fatal outcomes, i.e., deaths through police violence. Furthermore, Black men are not only more likely to become embroiled in gang-related conflicts but also stand a greater chance of falling victim to them. Given the context, Barry's anxiety for Daniel and his apprehension about potential bad news are understandable; his grandson faces inherent risks just by being in certain places at certain times. In Evaristo's narrative, it is worth noting that Barry, when referring to the police, does not expect them to genuinely uphold their duty to protect and serve him or his grandson. Instead, he views them primarily as harbingers of bad news. Evaristo's subtle yet powerful representation speaks volumes about the complex and often broken relationship Black Caribbean men maintain with British law enforcement: a bond marred by the pervasive systemic racism that continues to influence it.

3. “I am not homosexual, I am Barrysexual”: rules and regulations for desire

For the most part, black sexuality was cloaked in white fantasy and fear. Black women were thought to be hot and ready to be bothered. Black men were believed to have big sexual desires and even bigger organs to realize their lust.

(Dyson 2001: 312f.)

Black bodies have a long history of being sexualised by White european colonisers. Irrespective of their gender, they have been consistently subjected to the sexualising, dehumanising, and marginalising gazes of White Europeans. Prevailing narratives associated with Black sexuality tend to oscillate between hypersexualisation and asexuality, leaving minimal space for diversified portrayals. Cornel West’s seminal article elucidates this dichotomy, providing distinct categories: A Black woman can either be “Jezebel (the seductive temptress), Sapphire (the evil, manipulative bitch), or Aunt Jemima (the sexless, long-suffering nurturer)” (West 2001: 301). These categorisations not only serve to pigeonhole Black women and their sexuality, but they also underscore the inherent power dynamics of these imposed identities: Black women are portrayed either as objects of desire, as threatening figures wielding their sexuality to access power, or as maternal figures devoid of any sexual agency.

Concurrently, Black men are frequently reduced to similarly rigid stereotypes. West describes their roles as “Bigger Thomas (the mad and mean predatory craver of white women), Jack Johnson (the super performer [...] who excels others naturally [sic] and prefers women of a lighter hue), or Uncle Tom (the spineless, sexless – or is it impotent? – sidekick of whites)” (West 2001: 302). Both Bigger Thomas and Jack Johnson, while differing in their specific characterizations, are presented as undermining White male authority and control. The former does this through overt hostility and posing a perceived threat, while the latter does it subtly through superior prowess and capability, which often extends beyond the merely sexual realm. Essentially, Black identities have been simplified and distorted to align with exaggerated, monolithic sexual stereotypes created by the White Western world. This chapter investigates not only where these dominant representations regarding Black sexuality originate, but also how Evaristo, Levy, and Smith’s works challenge them.

The first chapter explores paradigms of Black heteronormativity, paying particular attention to characters such as Evaristo's Barry, who defy and subvert these simplistic portrayals to reclaim their own sexual identity. The subsequent subchapter centres on the racialised discourse surrounding sexual entitlement, exploring the intricate interplay of sexuality, desire, race, and the emergent power structures. Lastly, the analysis shifts to focus on racialised perspectives on sexual ethics, primarily in the context of extramarital relationships. Overall, this chapter uses the literary novels by Evaristo, Levy, and Smith as a basis to challenge and recontextualize these stereotypical narratives characterised above to reveal a more nuanced perspective.

Scripts of Black heteronormativity

Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman [sic], because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours?
(Lorde 1984: 41f.)

Homophobia remains notably pervasive and wide-spread in both Black British and Black American communities. Non-heteronormative sexual orientations within these communities have historically been marginalised and classified as a so-called 'White disease'. There are several problematic aspects about this wording: Firstly, such characterisations depict desire outside of the heteronormative realm as an illness, i.e. an ailment that needs to be cured. However, the societal conceptualisation of homosexuality as a pathological condition is not exclusively tied to, nor did it originate from, the Black community. Instead, this view arguably emerges from the penalisation of non-canonical sexualities in the Western World during the 19th century. In his seminal work, *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault articulates that "[t]here were two great systems conceived by the West for governing sex: the law of marriage and the order of desires" (1978 [1976]: 40). While transgressions against the former could be adjudged as legislative or moral infringements, violations against the latter were construed as crimes against nature. This perspective is exemplified in Carl Westphal's 19th-century article "Die conträre [sic] Sexualempfindung"²² In his clinical

²² German for "The contrary sexual sensation".

observations, Westphal characterises homosexuality as "an innate perversion of the gender sensation with the awareness of the morbidity of this phenomenon" (1869: 73; my translation). Thus, Westphal's discourse does not merely identify same-sex attraction but actively pathologises it, framing it as a condition necessitating clinical recognition and intervention. His narrative positions homosexuals not simply as transgressors of moral codes but as individuals with clinical ailments:

Just as there is pathological theft and murder, there is also a pathological confusion of gender, without the vast majority of cases of theft, murder, and unnatural lewdness being pathological. [...] Should §143 of the Criminal Code²³ ever be repealed, and should the spectre of prison no longer loom threateningly over the confession of perverse inclination, then the relevant cases will certainly reach doctors in greater numbers, as that is the domain to which they belong. (1869: 108; my translation)

While Westphal did not, in my understanding, single-handedly pathologise homosexuality, his work undeniably added momentum to both the scientific and the broader societal discourse that culminated in such pathologisation. A salient feature of his medical treatise that is exemplified in the excerpt above is the nuanced differentiation between isolated acts of 'unnatural lewdness' and a broader clinical condition. This represents a pivotal shift in perspective: instead of perceiving acts of same-sex desire as mere episodic instances of what would then have been considered as 'moral deviance', they began to be interpreted within the medical realm as symptomatic of an inherent disorder, encompassing cognitive, physiological, and behavioural aspects. From a contemporary perspective, it appears that Westphal might have anticipated the decriminalisation of homosexuality through his reference to §143. However, he remained resolute in his belief that, irrespective of its legal standing, homosexuality should be viewed as a pathological condition. Westphal's writings imply a preference for understanding 'pathological same-sex attraction' not primarily as a legal infraction but as a condition warranting medical intervention, as indicated by his allusion to it belonging to the medical field ("as that is the domain to which they belong"). Instead of merely categorising homosexuals as legal offenders, Westphal's discourse suggests an inherent deviation in their nature, a notion that

²³ Here, Westphal does not refer to the German Criminal Code created in 1871 (*Strafgesetzbuch*), but to its precursor, the *Criminal Code for the Prussian States* of April 14, 1851. §143 of this code states that "Unnatural lewdness, which is committed between persons of male gender or between humans and animals, is to be punished with imprisonment from six months up to four years, as well as with the temporary deprivation of the exercise of civil honour rights." (*Criminal Code for the Prussian States* 1851: 47; my translation).

might be considered even more stigmatising. Michel Foucault offers a deeper exploration into the evolution of homosexuality as an identity, highlighting its deeply rooted historical and pathological characterisations:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. (1978 [1976]: 43)

In essence, Foucault articulates that, within the context of 19th-century medical and societal discourse, homosexuality was constructed as an immutable facet of one's identity, profoundly influencing, if not dictating, their very essence. He elucidates that same-sex attraction was "made into a principle of classification and intelligibility, established as a *raison d'être* and a natural order of disorder" (1978 [1976]: 44; italics original). Such categorisation further facilitated the establishment of a power dynamic, situating homosexuality as pathological, 'unnatural', and ethically untenable, thereby positioning heterosexuality as the normative and exclusive paradigm.

While homosexuality still operates as an identity marker in the Western world, the majority of the British population no longer opposes it or believes it to be an illness²⁴. This is not true for many Black communities in the UK and the US, where same-sex unions continue to be called the 'White disease'. This phrasing creates a cultural narrative that implies a deep-seated incompatibility between Black identity and non-heteronormative sexualities. Consequently, all forms of queer desire in Black people are pathologised and classified as inherently 'unnatural'. As Simon Nelson explains in an interview for *The Guardian*, "[h]omophobia in the wider black community is very common, and is often deemed to be acceptable behaviour. [...] There is a strong belief that black people simply can't be gay" (cit. in Branigan 2003: 3). Put differently, Black members of the LGBTQIA+ community often grapple with what I would call 'prejudice squared': externally, i.e., from White Europeans and Americans, due to the intersection of their race and sexuality; and internally, from the homophobia ingrained within their own ethnic communities.

²⁴ For statistical data provided by the ONS underpinning this statement, see the last subchapter of chapter three of the present thesis.

The origins of Black racialised homophobia are complex, rooted in a myriad of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors. Michelle Monari posits that the influence and teachings of the Black church play a significant role in shaping these perceptions, suggesting that religious institutions have historically perpetuated and cemented such biases:

Religion has played a massive role in homophobia still having a part in the Black diaspora. The theologically-driven anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in white churches is also heavy in the Black church. Significant portions of the Black diaspora hold the Black church as a central part of their community no matter where their place in the world. (Monari 2020: 4)

In other words, a significant part of homophobia within Black communities originates from, is disseminated through, and is perpetuated by the Christian religious doctrines and narratives promulgated by the Black church. However, it is vital to recognise where these religious doctrines originated: The Black church, while predominantly composed of Black Christians as its designation implies, has its roots deeply embedded in White religious traditions. Historically, these traditions have often portrayed same-sex attraction and its expressions as deviant or sinful transgressions. Such homophobic perspectives resonated with societal, legal, and medical narratives of the 19th century, which often likened same-sex attraction to an illness that tainted and debilitated the individual afflicted by it. Leah Buckle explains that this widespread homophobia did not only affect Great Britain, but significantly also its former colonies:

There is a direct correlation between countries which belong to the Commonwealth, and therefore have previously been under British rule, and countries that still have homophobic biphobic and/or transphobic legislature in their constitutions. 25 per cent of the world's population (2.4 billion people) currently live in a country belonging to the Commonwealth, however they make up a disproportionately large 50 per cent of countries that still criminalise homosexuality. (2020: 3)

The prevailing rates of legal prohibition against homosexuality among (former) Black Commonwealth countries suggest a lingering influence of colonial-era homophobic ideologies on contemporary legal and societal norms. This perspective finds resonance in the words of High Court Judge Michael Leburu of Botswana, who, in the landmark decision that decriminalised homosexuality in the country in 2019, stated that “the anti-sodomy laws are a British import²⁵, enacted “without the

²⁵ Significantly, this phenomenon is specific to anglophone territory, and particularly the former British colonies. Certainly. Following the First French Revolution in 1750, France took the step to repeal its anti-sodomy statutes – a move that predated similar British actions by two centuries, with Britain decriminalising such acts only in 1967. This distinction is further reflected in their respective post-colonial spheres of influence. Within La Francophonie's 54 member states, a mere 33 percent

consultation of local peoples” (cit. in Buckle 2020: 1). Though it may be an oversimplification to solely attribute heightened homophobia in these regions to British colonialism, there is a discernible parallel to the phenomenon of internalised racism. It appears that many Black congregations, especially the religious sector, have not only internalised these colonial-derived beliefs but have also reinforced and amplified them in their distinct contexts. As Brown Douglas notes, “[Black Church people] are viewed as not simply homophobic but more homophobic than other populations of society” (2006: 1). This troubling trend is evident across the Black diaspora as well as in many African countries, underscoring its relevance in both British and American narratives. Further elucidating this, Kendall Thomas highlights the tendency of certain Black religious communities to ignore deviations from sexual norms deliberately when venerating their prominent figures, even if those individuals were openly and proudly homosexual:

They all praised James Baldwin as a son of black Harlem who had faithfully borne witness to the suffering and struggle of his people. This, of course, was [...] the Baldwin of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *The Amen Corner*, and *The Fire Next Time*. Not one of these speakers mentioned the “other” Jimmy, the Baldwin of *Giovanni’s Room*, *Another Country*, and *Just Above My Head*, whose stories I had read as a confused teenager in Oroville, California. As I sat in that cold, cavernous cathedral, the silence about this Baldwin cut me to the core, because I knew that while Baldwin may have left America because he was black, he left Harlem, the place he called “home,” because he was gay. (Thomas 2001: 327)

Thomas’s account serves not only to bear testimony to Black homophobia, but also underscores the tendency to efface salient aspects of a Black person’s (creative) identity when it does not align with preconceived traditional forms of self-expression and desire. However, painting Black religious communities with a broad brush as solely antagonistic oversimplifies their multi-layered role in Black diasporic cultures. Vanessa ‘VV’ Brown elucidates that the Windrush generation, in particular, gravitated towards and maintained deep ties with the Black church. To these people, it served as a metaphorical anchor of solace in the face of the systemic racism they encountered when trying to establish themselves in post-war Britain. Brown acknowledges the positive aspects of the institution, which offered, at least to heterosexual Black British people, a sense of community and solidarity. Yet, Brown simultaneously critiques the regressive ‘Christian’ values promulgated by the Black

retain laws that criminalise homosexuality. In contrast, such legislations are upheld in 66 percent of Commonwealth nations (Buckle 2020: 4).

church. In her assessment, these values portray gay Black individuals as ‘subhuman’ entities, effectively inhibiting many from publicly embracing their sexuality. The profound dread of ostracization from the church, and by extension potential alienation from family and community, became a source of anxiety and dread for many, further complicating their coming-out (Brown 2021: 6-10). This real-world phenomenon is manifested in the literary sphere through Evaristo’s *Mr Loverman*. In the narrative, the character Carmel, grappling with the aftermath of perinatal depression, seeks and finds solace in a community of Black church women. When she invites them over for lunch, one of them, Merty, engages in derogatory gossip about Melissa, a Black lesbian doctor:

What I always say is, if woman was meant to lie down with woman, God would have given woman penis. [...] If Melissa is one of those lesbian characters, [...] it is an abomination. Does it not say in Romans that if man lies with man as he lies with woman, he will surely be put to death? Same goes with woman-woman business, and even that high and mighty pope over there in the Vatican agrees with me on this one. (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 56f.)

Analysing Merty’s vituperative discourse, several salient observations emerge: Firstly, her focus falls squarely on Melissa, a general practitioner and an esteemed figure within the Black community. Considering the broader visibility of White members within the LGBTQIA+ community, Merty’s particular choice appears indicative of two potential underlying beliefs: either a latent tolerance for White queer individuals (as posited by Couzens, Mahoney & Wilkinson 2017) or an intensified intolerance specifically towards Black queer individuals. This suggests a compounded discrimination experienced by Black queer individuals, an intersectionality arising from both their racial and sexual identities. Furthermore, in defending her position, Merty invokes two pillars of moral authority: the *Bible* and the Pope. Her word choice notably draws upon a distinct biblical verse from Leviticus, specifically: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22 NRSV). Alluding to scriptural language serves not only as a reference but also as a tactic for Merty to confer upon herself an aura of legitimacy and credibility, elevating her status within the (religious) power hierarchy. In addition, this strategy effectively externalises the onus of her beliefs, grounding them in sources traditionally perceived as sacrosanct, thereby shielding herself from immediate critique. Yet, her arguments do not go unchallenged. Donna, Barry’s older daughter, highlights Merty’s selective approach to following Christian teachings. She refers to various arbitrary biblical rules, such as

those against eating shellfish or wearing mixed fabrics, pointing out that many of these rules are now viewed as outdated and are often ignored by contemporary Christians. However, Merty refuses to let Donna win the confrontation, associating her son Daniel with homosexual behaviour:

So, Donna, [...] if Daniel was one of *them*, an anti-man, you'd be happy with that? [...] Would you approve? Would you tell your friends and skip around your house singing? [...] Look at him... [...] He could become an anti-man. All his speaky-spokiness and private schooling that everyone knows is a breeding ground for sodomites. (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 59f.; italics original)

Merty's commentary on the potential implications of Daniel's homosexuality serves as a literary manifestation of the sociocultural phenomenon articulated by Vanessa 'VV' Brown earlier in this subchapter. Her narrative illustrates the stigma and social displacement queer Black British people face. While Merty's rhetoric avoids overt terms such as 'ostracisation' or 'rejection', she implies something arguably even more devastating: namely, that being gay compromises Daniel's masculinity. Merty's perspective suggests a complex discriminatory stance: Within her paradigm, being Black and queer appears to destabilise traditional notions of Black femininity and masculinity alike. In the first quote, she implies that queer Black women are an 'abomination' and do not embody 'authentic' femininity, just as queer Black men, whom she calls 'anti-men', cannot meet her definition of 'authentic' masculinity. Beyond merely failing to embody her ideal of masculinity, Merty's label of 'anti-man' denotes someone who actively challenges or negates the very essence of what constitutes a 'real' man. She perceives Daniel as especially vulnerable to becoming such an anti-man due to his high quality education. This perspective illustrates her conflation of homophobia with anti-intellectualism, a convergence which has been described by scholars such as Carlos Dews and Carolyn Law (1998). Her perspective underscores the multi-faceted prejudice faced by those who exist at the crossroads of race and non-normative sexuality, suggesting that their expressions of gender, when intersected with race, are perceived as compromised by their queerness. In essence, Merty's statement highlights the multi-layered prejudice at the intersection of racism and homophobia fueled by discriminatory Christian narratives.

At the beginning of *Mr Loverman*, this cultural narrative is echoed by Morris, Barry's lover. Barry recounts that Morris "[s]aid he [...] couldn't be a West Indian and

not start a family – *man haf fu do what man haf fu do*²⁶. Truth is, both of us was desperate to be anything other than what we was” (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 32.; italics original). This excerpt illustrates how both Morris and Barry have profoundly internalised racialised homophobia – a specific strand of prejudice found uniquely within Black communities, evident as well in Merty’s commentary. Under its influence, they perceive their social acceptance and affirmation as 'authentic' Black men to be reliant on their compliance with entrenched societal norms. This cultural pressure, in essence, leads them to suppress their preferences and desires in favour of aligning with community-imposed expectations. Consequently, they consider it both morally more acceptable and strategically safer to (more or less) discreetly engage in extramarital relations with each other than to declare their homosexuality openly. As their children grow and leave the family home, Morris dares to suggest that they finally "share a midlife crisis" (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 34), i.e., move in together. Yet, Barry is unable to shake off his deep-rooted, internalised fears:

“Morris,” I replied slowly. “I don’t know if I can jump into the great abyss of social alienation with you”.

I’d been under such pressure back home. A young man showing no interest in girls, when he could have any of them? [...]

“You forgotten what happened to Horace Johnson?” I said on my lap. “Most popular teacher in out school, lived alone, didn’t have a girl, didn’t mix and was accused of touching up some fella in the market. Remember the day he hanged himself in the crazy house?”

We all thought England was goin’ be utopia. (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 34f.; italics original)

Barry’s fear extends beyond mere concerns about the possible implications of living as an openly Black queer person, since it is rooted in harrowing memories of very real consequences faced by people like him in the past. While the unsettling incident involving Horace Johnson transpired in Antigua, its implications have notably heightened Barry’s sense of insecurity, even in Britain. The concluding sentence underscores that the UK, though outwardly progressive, remains fraught with challenges for Black queer individuals. This fictional dialogue from *Mr Loverman* is embedded in the socio-cultural landscape of the 1980s, and later in the book it is revealed that in 2010, Barry finally feels safe enough to leave Carmel and express

²⁶ In Evaristo’s *Mr Loverman*, various characters speak in (Jamaican) Patois, an English-based creole language spoken in the West Indies. While it incorporates influences from West African, Taino, Irish, Spanish, Hindi, Portuguese, Chinese, and German, it is generally intelligible to proficient English speakers. Therefore, I will neither provide translations nor mark it as ‘incorrect’.

his affection for Morris publicly. Yet, a recent study conducted by King's and University College London reveals that despite these societal changes in attitude, many of Barry's apprehensions remain salient in contemporary times. The lead author, Amal R. Khanolkar, elucidates, "despite [the] rhetoric on addressing ethnic- and sexuality-based inequalities, individuals possessing multiple minority identities often find themselves marginalised by both governmental policies and broader societal attitudes" (cit. in King's College London 2022: 5). In essence, while public awareness has seen an increase and political declarations have been made with the intent to improve the status quo for queer members of ethnic minorities, it appears that society is only at the outset of recognising the profound challenges faced by individuals who exist at the intersection of race and homosexuality. Nevertheless, deeply ingrained societal attitudes and cultural expectations persist, and systemic discrimination remains prevalent.

“WHORE!”: racialised discourses of sexual entitlement

Sexual harassment in the UK is not only an issue of gender, but also of race: Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) spanning 2018 to 2020 indicates that women face a risk of sexual assault that is over threefold compared to men. Furthermore, individuals of Black or Black British and Mixed ethnicities encounter a notably increased likelihood of experiencing such incidents relative to those from White and Asian backgrounds (ONS 2021a). Consequently, Black British women find themselves at the intersection of two pronounced vulnerabilities when it comes to the threat of sexual harassment: their gender and their racial identity.

To investigate why Black women face such an elevated risk of being subjected to sexual assault, it is crucial to take a closer look at two particular factors: first, the intricate cultural nexus between sexuality and power dynamics, and second, the colonial legacies that continue to eroticise and concurrently dehumanise the racial 'other'. Regarding the former, Andrea Dworkin's groundbreaking work, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (2019 [1981]), sheds light on the gendered power hierarchies culturally inscribed in sexual relations. She contends that 'traditional', normative conceptions of sexuality – as portrayed in pornography – broadly act as arenas in which patriarchal structures both originate and are continually reaffirmed. Within this framework, the representation of women as passive, sexually submissive

entities juxtaposed against the portrayal of men as active dominators is not merely a depiction. Rather, it establishes and mirrors the foundational tenets of patriarchy, painting them as inherent and ubiquitous within societal interactions:

The ideology of male sexual domination posits that men are superior to women [and] that physical possession of the female is a natural right of the male; that sex is, in fact, conquest and possession of the female [...]; that the use of the female body for sexual or reproductive purposes is a natural right of men; that the sexual will of men properly and naturally defines the parameters of a woman's sexual being, which is her whole identity. The metaphysics of male sexual domination is that women are whores. This basic truth transcends all lesser truths in the male system. One does not violate something by using it for what it is: neither rape nor prostitution is an abuse of the female because in both the female is fulfilling her natural function; that is why rape is absurd and incomprehensible as an abusive phenomenon in the male system, and so is prostitution, which is held to be voluntary even when the prostitute is hit, threatened, drugged, or locked in. (Dworkin 2019 [1981]: 54)

Dworkin argues that sex becomes more than a mere reproductive act, evolving instead into a symbolic performance to assert and manifest male dominance as an established fact. She further postulates that within these patriarchal paradigms, both rape and prostitution are legitimised and seen through a distorted lens where the woman is perceived as merely 'fulfilling her natural function'. The woman's own will is not only secondary, but of no importance at all, seeing that – following this line of argumentation – being used as a mere tool for reproduction and male pleasure is her *raison d'être*. In this particular case, women are not only reduced to little more than 'walking wombs', but they are also actively dehumanised, given that they are solely viewed as a means to an end, but not as sentient beings. Here, Dworkin points out two crucial issues which merit further attention and deconstruction, namely the very notion of a woman having an inherent, 'natural' function and her role as a passive sexual object to men. The belief that a woman serves merely as a means for men to reproduce and experience pleasure has been, arguably, societally sanctioned and frequently reiterated. However, this perspective is not anchored in empirical or biological realities, but instead conflates culturally fabricated narratives with fact-based evidence. It is a covert, unmarked coalescence of socially constructed roles presented under the guise of 'universal truths'. In essence, these roles function to perpetuate the prevailing power hierarchy. This phenomenon is best expressed in Roland Barthes's concept of myth, which describes the process in which dominant ideologies are naturalised and presented as givens, obscuring their (quite literally) man-made nature:

[D]riven to having either to unveil or to liquidate the concept, it will naturalize it. We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature [...] [E]verything happens as if the picture naturally conjured up the concept, as if the signifier gave a foundation to the signified [...] [M]yth is speech justified in excess. (Barthes 1973: 129f)

Essentially, in this case, the signifier, women, are inextricably intertwined with the signified, namely the numerous narratives that depict women predominantly as instruments of reproduction, designed for male procreation and pleasure, but most importantly for (violent) displays of gendered power hierarchies. This portrayal is then labelled as 'natural', a term which, analogous to the assertion of something being 'God-given', stifles dissident voices because it is virtually impossible to challenge an idea portrayed as 'inherent' or 'divinely ordained'.

While Dworkin's work elucidates the foundational dynamics that facilitate sexual harassment, her analysis does not overtly incorporate race into the equation. Yet, in one instance, she fittingly employs a word which already foreshadows why Black women are more at risk: "Male sexual domination is a material system with an ideology and a metaphysics. The sexual colonisation of women's bodies is a material reality: men control the sexual and reproductive uses of women's bodies" (2019 [1981]: 54). The governing principle of Colonialism is the systematic domination of a racialised 'Other'. Thus, with the advent of the Transatlantic Slave trade, the White men's realm of control expanded: Instead of holding dominion solely over their wives and children, they now also put themselves in authority over Brown and Black slaves of all genders. As Nell Irvin Painter posits, the very creation of racial categories, such as 'Black' and 'White', is a relatively modern phenomenon, born out of the need to distinguish the colonisers from the colonised. While Europe historically did have light-skinned slaves, the Transatlantic Slave Trade fundamentally changed the extent of slavery and precipitated a convergence of race and class. By the 19th century, the term 'White' was synonymous with freedom, while 'Black' and 'Brown' were indicative of (former) enslavement (Painter 2010: 201). Following Painter's line of argumentation, race was entangled with class from the moment it was introduced as a cultural category and marker of difference.

Black women, being both female and non-White, unite the two factors that effectively put them at the very bottom of the power hierarchy. This is particularly relevant given that Stuart Hall, who is not only a groundbreaking sociologist but a Jamaican-born member of the Windrush generation, explains the importance of the realm of sexuality for the colonial mission: "Sexuality thus became a powerful

element in the fantasy which the West constructed, and the ideas of sexual innocence and experience, sexual domination and submissiveness, play out in the complex dance in the discourses of ‘The West and the Rest’” (1992: 210; emphasis). In essence, the discourse of empire and colonial domination are inextricably intertwined with sexuality. Black bodies were eroticised and fetishised (Pozanesi 2005, Miller-Young 2014, Nash 2014) and fundamentally portrayed as the exact opposite to the White Bourgeoisie: While the latter were viewed as civilised, restrained, pure, and disciplined (Mulholland 2019: 1133), the former were considered lascivious, uncivilised, dangerous, and ‘natural’ (as in feral) (Pozanesi 2005, Levine 2008, Crais & Scully 2009). Consequently, a narrative was created that did not only distinguish between Black and White and male and female, but also every combination of these categories. According to Monique Mulholland, “gendered discourses of empire established a hierarchy of femininity: the sexualities of white bourgeois femininity were set apart from black women” (2019: 1133). Put differently, White and Black women as well as their sexualities were portrayed as fundamentally different, yet both of them had to answer to the same ‘master’: White men.

Numerous historical accounts attest to sexual abuse and exploitation of Black female slaves at the hands of their White masters. Barbara Omolade elucidates this by illustrating that the enslaved woman was often seen in fragments, where “every part” of her was used. She explains: “to him she was a fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered: her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and vagina” (1994: 7). Such fragmentation persists as a technique in contemporary media representations, exemplified, *inter alia*, by the male gaze in films like the Bond series. Fragmentation dehumanises individuals, predominantly women, transforming them into mere objects, segmenting them into often sexualized components devoid of holistic humanity. Hill contends that this pervasive objectification of Black women, accompanied by institutionalized rape, “spawned the controlling image of the jezebel or sexually wanton Black women²⁷” (2004: 56). The evident presence of these deeply entrenched, sexist stereotypes raises the query: *cui bono*? Upon close analysis, the depiction of Black women as inherently lascivious appears strategically employed to justify any sexual misconduct or even outright aggression perpetrated by colonisers. By representing Black women as instinctual and invariably desirous, it effectively

²⁷ See beginning of chapter three of the present thesis.

negated the possibility of their being violated, under the premise that they lacked the capacity to withhold consent. This mirrors contemporary scenarios where some women are deemed as 'asking for it' due to their choice of attire. In the colonial context, Black slaves were similarly portrayed as inherently compliant to the sexual advances or whims of their colonisers, or at the very least 'not not asking for it', by mere virtue of their existence.

While there are no overt references to rape in the novels analysed in the present theses, a disconcerting episode does emerge in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* concerning the protagonist's father. Tracey makes an unsuccessful attempt to access his apartment and subsequently approaches the rear window of the room where the protagonist typically sleeps during her visits. It is within this context that the following observation is made – ostensibly – and later recounted in a letter surreptitiously pushed through the door:

There she saw my father, naked, on top of something, moving up and down, and at first she had naturally thought it was a woman, and if it had been a woman, or so she assured me, then she never would have mentioned it, it was none of her business or mine, but the fact was it was not a woman at all, it was a doll, human-sized, but inflated, and of very dark complexion – 'like a golliwog', she wrote – with a crescent of synthetic lamb's-wool hair and a huge pair of bright red lips, red as blood. (Smith 2016: 350)

While neither readers nor the protagonist can ascertain if the scene in question genuinely transpired or is a product of Tracey's vivid imagination, the implications, if true, are multilayered and deeply unsettling. Firstly, the act of engaging in a sexual act with a doll on the very bed where his daughter sleeps during her visits raises disconcerting questions about boundaries and propriety. The choice of the doll, which is Black with exaggerated, caricatured features, including synthetic lamb's-wool hair and an oversized red mouth, amplifies this disquiet. Tracey distinctly labels it a 'golliwog', a racist stereotype Gifford & Seidman define as a "black doll with fuzzy hair and a grotesque appearance (implicitly racist)" (2008: 388). Recollecting Father's fervent desire to impregnate Mother²⁸, ostensibly to firmly anchor her in his life, this act can be interpreted as a surrogate gesture. It poses challenges to the protagonist's idealised perception of Father because he was more present in her childhood and young adult years, juxtaposed against her more critical view of the studious, absent-minded, ambitious Mother. This incident raises the possibility that Father's affection for Mother is not, as the protagonist thinks, purely romantic but could be

²⁸ See chapter two of the present thesis.

interpreted as an attempt to exert dominion over a racialised female 'Other', reminiscent of the colonial attitudes and behaviours outlined above. However, distinguishing him from the colonial archetype, Father – at least outside of his bedroom and away from the golliwog doll – ultimately respects Mother's autonomy, accepting their separation, rather than imposing himself upon her, as colonisers probably would have.

Smith's literary exploration delves into the deeply troubling portrayal of the objectification, sexualization, and dehumanisation of Black women by their intimate partners. While having a life-sized Black female sex doll to realise fantasies of (sexual) domination is – hopefully – rather rare in real life, domestic abuse amongst Black British women, especially at the hands of present or former partners, is not. Data from the Office for National Statistics affirms that the primary perpetrators in a majority of sexual assault incidents involving women were indeed their intimate partners or former partners (ONS 2021a). Considering this data alongside Tracey's narrative about a father's overt objectification and sexualization of a Black female likeness, the possible motivations behind Mother's decision to distance herself from him become clearer. It is crucial to recognise that the central character, and by extension the reader, is privy only to observed events, but not to the potential transgressions that might have transpired behind doors.

Illicit affairs: across the boundaries of gender, race, and marriage

Illicit affairs play a pivotal role in the narratives of *Small Island*, *Mr Loverman*, and *Swing Time*. While the overarching theme of race is constantly present in the relationships under discussion, within the framework of these novels, each liaison contravenes distinct societal norms. In Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, the clandestine affair between Queenie and Michael transgresses societal expectations of racialised attraction, given that, as mentioned in chapter two of the present thesis, interracial relationships were frowned upon in post-war Britain. Conversely, *Mr Loverman* by Bernardine Evaristo delves into the complex relationship between Barrington and Morris, a poignant critique of heteronormativity, which excludes the possibility of same-sex attraction. In Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*, the clandestine affair between the protagonist and Lamin is arguably also an act of rebellion challenging Aimée's power, which, in my reading, is an example of neo-colonialism. In essence, each of these

novels magnifies a different type of subversion of societal protocols surrounding romantic relationships, offering insights into possible repercussions.

Interracial relationships in post-war Britain were characterised by particular stereotypes disseminated through public discourse. Predominantly, these representations revolved around the trope of the dangerous Black male figure, ostensibly threatening and criminal, targeting the unsuspecting, innocent White female. Such narratives were not merely isolated incidents of prejudice but can be understood as symptomatic of deeper societal anxieties and racial biases. Anna Maguire's article on parental intervention into mixed-relationships in post-war Britain underscores this perspective. She posits that there exists a vision, perhaps not ubiquitous but certainly pervasive, that allegorises "the threat of black sexuality, and its connotations with danger and crime, overcoming the White woman, who stood for nation and prestige" (Maguire 2019: 432). This imagery not only reinforced racial stereotypes but also served to conflate notions of national identity, racial purity, and honour with the ostensible vulnerability and naiveté of White women.

Sheila Patterson's investigative study in the 1950s, centred on the West Indian community in London, offers an insight into the prevailing societal narratives of the time. An account from her research records the sentiment of a middle-aged White man: "I'd be frightened to let my daughter walk along Coldharbour Lane alone at night now – there are so many Blacks about, the place looks like the darkest Africa, and they say most of them carry knives" (Patterson 1963: 216). While on the surface, this statement may be perceived merely as a racist manifestation of parental concern, it is connected to a broader, deep-seated anxiety rooted in notions of conquest and control. As discussed in the preceding subchapter, the influence of colonialist mechanisms extend far beyond the venture itself. Said mechanisms are present in the minutiae of everyday life, and particularly in gendered power relations within relationships. The arrival of the Windrush generation added another layer of complexity to the hierarchical system in place.

Equating colonialist ventures with sexual conquests is by no means a novel phenomenon. Christopher Columbus, in his travel narratives, likened the earth to the shape of a woman's breast, and explorers frequently used terms such as "virgin land" to describe the ostensibly untouched terrains of the 'New World' (McClintock 1995). This wording not only erroneously implies that the American continent was devoid of habitation prior to European incursions, but it is also imbued with gendered

connotations. In the words of Caren Holmes, this "narrative of imperialization depicts the New World through rhetoric typically attributed to women, signifying the land as passive and receptive, poised for male conquest" (2016: 1). The arrival of the Windrush generation heralded what can be perceived as a role reversal within colonial dynamics: Those who were once colonised began to 'settle' in the territory of their former colonisers. Notably, among the first social spaces they 'conquered'²⁹ were intimate relationships with White women. Maguire elaborates on this phenomenon, suggesting that "mixed-race relationships more broadly have been seen as a symbol of the anxiety around the infiltration of the former empire into the metropole, transitioning race relations from public spaces to the very heart of domestic life" (2019: 434). In essence, these relationships and affairs were perceived as undermining the imperial mission itself, eliciting adverse reactions from a substantial segment of the general population. In *Small Island*, Queenie's meticulous effort to conceal her pregnancy from curious neighbours reflect her fears of being judged – and Bernard being pitied – because of said hostile attitudes:

I wanted it kept from nosy-parkers – Mr Todd and his horrible sister. Nudging, pointing, whispering. 'What a how [sic] d'you do? Poor Bernard, what did that blessed man do to deserve her? The darkies are bad enough but now an illegitimate child. Whatever next in that house of ill-repute?' I wasn't ashamed, I just didn't want prying eyes making it sordid. (Levy 2022 [2004]: 496.)

As can be seen in this excerpt, these societal prejudices manifest in characters such as 'Mr Todd and his disapproving sister'. They are representative of a broader societal bias which ultimately compels Queenie to entrust her child, Michael, to Hortense and Gilbert, who are Black as well. In my reading, her motivations are twofold: Firstly, this act enables both Queenie and, perhaps more pertinently, Bernard to sidestep the societal 'stigma' associated with rearing an illegitimate child of a different race. Secondly, it serves as a protective measure for baby Michael. While racism would still be a looming spectre in his life with Black adoptive parents, his darker skin could allow him to be perceived as their biological offspring. This not only grants him a veneer of legitimacy but also distances him from the societal disapproval reserved for relationships that, in post-war Britain, stood at the

²⁹ Using the term 'conquered' to describe voluntary migration under the British Nationality Act (1948) is misleading: While the British Nationality Act (1948) extended an invitation to colonial subjects to join Britain's workforce, equating it with actual conquering and (counter-)colonising may be more indicative of colonisers' anxieties than factual parallels.

intersection of matrimonial and racial transgressions, thereby undermining colonial objectives.

The central romantic affair in Evaristo's *Mr Loverman* also presents a deviation from societal norms, albeit of a different nature. Barry's and Morris's relationship contests the foundational principles of heteronormativity, which, in its most orthodox interpretation, prescribes sexual attraction strictly between masculine men and feminine women. Yet, this is not the only potential vulnerability the duo grapples with: As discussed in chapter two of the present thesis, they confront potential marginalisation not only owing to their sexual orientation but also due to their racial identities, as is illustrated in the traumatic history of discrimination they had to endure, particularly in their home country, Antigua:

"This is 1980s London, Barry," Morris said, sitting up and facing me. "Not 1950s St John's. Why we acting so back-wards? *It is legal. We are legal.* Nobody goin' arrest us. 'Tis we own blasted business what we do, and everybody else can keep their small-minded noses out of it." He put his hand on my wrist. I didn't realize it was shaking.

"This is some heavy crap we dealing with, Morris". (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 35; italics original)

While 1980s Britain, the time period in which this particular part of the novel is set, was certainly no paradise for Black gay men, they were at least accepted and protected *de iure*, even if they faced (and continue to face) *de facto* discrimination. Antigua and Barbuda, by contrast, only decriminalised homosexual relations in 2022 (Human Rights Watch 2022). In addition, empirical data suggests persistent societal reticence towards homosexuality in these regions. The Equality Index from 2016-2017 shows that 78.5% of Antiguan and Barbudans oppose the idea of homosexual individuals holding public office, with an even more pronounced 88.1% disapproving of same-sex marriages (Equaldex 2017a; Equaldex 2017b). Juxtaposing this with Britain's stance, data from 2023 demonstrates that 78% of the British population endorses same-sex marriages (Equaldex 2023). Although it is speculative to determine British sentiments in the 1980s, it is discernible that the United Kingdom has generally exhibited a more progressive orientation, both legally and societally, compared to several West Indian nations, which also becomes evident in Evaristo's story. However, the novel features a secondary transgression, namely the breach of the marriage between Barry and Carmel. This, at least according to their daughter Maxine, is the most problematic issue surrounding the homosexual relationship:

“By the time I was twenty-one and going to gay bars, I was pretty sure you and Uncle Morris were an ‘item’, but I never felt able to raise it with you. You’re my *dad*.” [...] If you’d been paying attention, it would have been obvious I’d be totally cool with your homosexuality. [...] What I do have a problem with, *how-evs* [sic], is that you’ve been cheating on Mum all this time. It’s been bugging me for twenty years.”

“It’s not really cheating –”

“Shuddup,, Daddy. It is cheating and, from a feminist perspective, totally out of order.” (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 220; italics original)

Maxine’s views on Barry and Morris’s relationship can be seen as representative of an emergent cohort of Black British citizens who manifest a progressive stance on homosexuality while condemning infidelity. This denotes a palpable shift in sociocultural values, especially when juxtaposed with the attitudes of the preceding generation, which primarily consisted of first-generation immigrants from the West Indies. As elucidated in the initial segment of chapter three, older members of the Windrush generation, particularly pious ones, predominantly exhibited staunch anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments. Conversely, this older demographic displayed a greater degree of tolerance towards marital infidelities and the phenomenon of absent fathers. Therefore, based on my interpretation, characters like Maxine, and to some extent Donna as well, embody a changing landscape in romantic ideals and relationships, namely one that prioritises loyalty, trust, and reliability over strict adherence to heteronormativity.

The final illicit affair examined in this chapter emerges between Lamin and the protagonist during her concluding visit to the African village in Smith’s *Swing Time*. This relationship differs from the others primarily, but not solely, in that it appears neither rooted in genuine affection nor attraction or passion. Instead, it seems to be more about filling a void of unrequited affection or, perhaps more significantly, an attempt to reclaim some power from Aimée. The Australian pop star extends beyond the mere roles of employer to the protagonist and strategic lover (for visa procurement) to Lamin. Given the pronounced disparities in racial and socioeconomic standing between the characters, Aimée wields considerable influence over both, given that she not only maintains them financially, but actively reshapes the African community with which they are associated. In essence, the protagonist and Lamin are entrapped in the popstar’s web of influence, an entanglement stemming from the complex interconnections between racial and class dynamics. This arguably serves as the primary impetus for Lamin and the protagonist to engage in their clandestine

affair. This liaison may be interpreted as a strategic act of reprisal, intending to evoke emotional distress in Aimée:

But though I told myself, as I headed out to Lamin's place – five or six times in all, and always late in the night – that we two were acting on an uncontrollable physical desire, I think we both knew perfectly well that whatever passion existed between us was directed through the other person towards something else, towards Hawa, or towards the idea of being loved, or simply to prove to ourselves our own mutual independence from Aimée. She was really the person we were aiming at with all our loveless fucking, as much a part of the process as if she were in the room. (Smith 2016: 421)

The protagonist and Lamin's actions are evidently driven by defiance, a deliberate – if, ultimately, vain – attempt to demonstrate to Aimée that, despite her extensive control over them, she does not possess them ("to prove to ourselves our own mutual independence from Aimée"). Both the language ('possessing' a person) and the context lend themselves to a postcolonial reading where Aimée is a symbolic representation of the colonising nations that exploit their slaves not only on an economic level (e.g., the protagonist), but also on a sexual one (e.g., Lamin).

In *Swing Time*, Aimée crafts a public image of herself as a benevolent figure by employing her vast wealth to establish a girls' school in an African village. On the surface, the project appears as a noble and valuable cause. However, it is soon revealed that Aimée's actions are mere manifestations of the phenomenon known as the White Saviour Industrial Complex. As explained by Teju Cole, "The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege" (2012: 5). This notion is highlighted by Aimée's statements: While she speaks of constructing "illuminated schools" to 'empower' girls, a closer examination exposes that this is primarily a reference to her album 'Illuminated,' which features lyrics such as "Hey girls, go get your dreams [...] you're strong [...] never give up" (2016: 196). Clearly, the lyrics are at a significant disconnect from the lived experiences of Black African girls and women in the village. Rather, they resonate with what Rosalind Gill calls 'neoliberal feminism', the movement that birthed the infamous 'girlboss' figure³⁰. Superficially, it appears to align with feminist principles when, in reality, it "exculpates the institutions of patriarchal capitalism and blames women for their disadvantaged positions [...] [while] centr[ing] notions of empowerment and choice" (Rottenberg, Gill & Banet-Weiser 2020: 16). In the

³⁰ For more information on the 'girlboss' phenomenon, see Samhita Mukhopadhyay (2021) and Eryca Worthen (2022).

specific situation at hand, it seems that Aimée's actions serve not only to absolve the patriarchal capitalist system but also – or rather, principally – to obscure the lingering traces of colonial structures. Ultimately, the school's creation appears less as a sincere effort to alleviate suffering and more as a calculated promotional gambit for a past album, aimed at increasing her popularity both in Europe and Africa. Aimée's willful ignorance of the complex realities facing Black girls and women living in poverty in rural Africa highlights the superficiality of her gesture.

Aimée functions as the embodiment of the White Saviour Industrial Complex, not solely because she evidently (although arguably ignorantly) exploits the African village for her own gain, but also due to her lack of genuine commitment to bringing about positive change. As the White popstar and the protagonist travel to the village by car, they encounter a scene of palpable roadside turmoil, predominantly made up of Black Africans engaging in various activities such as dancing, sleeping, and conversing. The scene is characterised predominantly by Black mothers caring for their children amidst stark poverty. Aimée, however, remains blissfully ignorant of the hardship surrounding her, instead delighting in the scene and attempting to mimic the dance moves she observes. Evoking Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil' (1963), Cole states that "[t]he banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm" (2012: 3). Put differently, portraying and stylising Black Africans as 'naturally poor but jolly' and 'happy with less', as is often the case in White Saviour narratives, actively obscures the underlying conditions that allow such poverty and misery to exist in the first place.

Aimée's neocolonialist views, carefully hidden – as is often the case – under the guise of development aid (Buba 2019; Scartelli 2022), are made explicit only when she is pushed to acknowledge her surroundings. As the protagonist draws attention to the human chaos and disaster unfolding around them, the star's response unveils her true sentiments regarding structural inequality in Africa. She dismisses the protagonist's concern, exclaiming, "'Jesus Christ, if you're gonna [sic] be shocked by every fucking sign of poverty you see here, this is going to be a mighty long trip. You're in Africa!' Just as if I'd asked why it was light outside and been told: 'It's daytime'" (2016: 198). Her reaction not only underscores a dismissive and superficial engagement with the very issues she purports to address, but also reveals the myth that seems to inform her worldview. This myth, in a Barthesian sense, posits that Black Africans live in poverty not due to centuries of exploitation by

colonisers, but supposedly due to an inherent incapability to build and maintain a prosperous society. Aimée's view erases a complex history of oppression and reduces it to an ostensibly 'natural' state of affairs. This perspective not only excuses her own actions but also those carried out under the banner of the Imperial Mission, conveniently absolving all responsibility for the status quo.

4. "A terrific instinct for middle class mores": class, race, and social ascension

The United Kingdom is characterised by a deeply entrenched system of class distinction. Following the teachings of Karl Marx (1867), citizens have traditionally been classified into one of three categories: the working class, the middle class, or the upper class³¹. Within this framework, which, as I argue subsequently, fails to capture the current class situation, an intriguing and misleading term has become widely known: the 'White working class.' This wording enjoys particular popularity within Conservative circles and is and was diffused through and countless reiterated by related media. It portrays the 'White working class' as the 'real' working class, in contrast to an 'othered' or 'fake' version that includes ethnic minorities. Such a dichotomy emphasises a perceived authenticity of the White working class and creates a stark division along racial lines. *Guardian* columnist Zoe Williams explains the mechanism behind the 'White working class' as follows:

The conception was unfalsifiable. All counter-evidence – other working-class people who were socially liberal, or valued immigration, or wanted to stay in the EU, or disapproved of the monarchy – was dismissed as coming from a false working class, either brainwashed by the elite, or a member of the elite in disguise. It was a completely deliberate mischaracterisation of the working class, and we could ruminate forever on who resisted it least effectively. Yet the cornerstone of its success was the insistence on whiteness as a distinct category. (2022: 6)

In other words, the very term 'White working class' is imbued with implicit racism: By constructing the working class as exclusively White, it effectively marginalises and dismisses the experiences of ethnic minorities within this group. According to Gurminder Bhamra, racial exclusion "fails to acknowledge the role played by race in

³¹ In Marxist terms, the working class aligns with the proletariat, or labour providers; the middle class includes elements of both labourers and small owners (*petite bourgeoisie*); and the upper class corresponds to the bourgeoisie, or capital owners. The focus is on the relationship to production, not income or status, dividing society into those who control capital and those who provide labour.

the very structuring of that world” (cit. in Sandhu 2018: 8), portraying the White experience as a universal standard. Although this characterization is never accurate, it is especially untrue in this particular context. In reality, ethnic minorities constitute the overwhelming majority of what is considered the British working class today. While this generalisation is incorrect in general, it is especially incorrect in this context. As I demonstrate subsequently, ethnic minorities comprise the overwhelming majority of those who can be considered British working class today.

The challenge begins with the traditional definition of 'class' and the assumption that Great Britain is home to only three distinct ones. This categorization might have been more accurate during the Victorian era when a person's relationship to the means of production could determine their class status. However, this narrow interpretation no longer holds true in contemporary society. The findings of the Great British Class Survey, commissioned by the BBC and published in 2013, provide a more nuanced perspective. The survey identified not merely three, but seven distinct classes within modern British society. These include the elite, the established middle class, the technical middle class, the new affluent workers, the traditional working class, emergent service workers, and the precariat (Savage et al. 2013). If an attempt were made to map these seven classes onto the more conventional three-class model, following Marxist principles, the traditional working class would be amalgamated with both emergent service workers and the precariat. These groups share the commonality of having drastically low economic capital and little to no access to the means of production. While the Great British Class Survey provides valuable data on the complex class hierarchy in the United Kingdom, it fails to acknowledge a factor which cannot be separated from socioeconomic standing: race. A significant proportion of the working class consists of individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds. (Eddo-Lodge 2018: 192). Consequently, a conventional understanding of the class system in Britain, especially one that ignores race or depicts the working class as primarily White, fails to capture its intricacies and nuances. This limited perspective disregards the complex nature of class hierarchies and relationships, thereby missing essential aspects of the broader socioeconomic landscape that include factors such as, *inter alia*, ethnic diversity, cultural intersections, and the interplay between different social strata.

This segment of the thesis delves into the portrayal of the complex interplay between class and race, particularly as it relates to the Windrush generation and their

descendants, in the literary works of Evaristo, Levy, and Smith. The initial subchapter embarks on an exploration of transgenerational cycles of poverty, casting a spotlight on the character of Tracey in *Swing Time*, and examining how her story might reflect broader socioeconomic patterns. Following this, attention shifts to *Mr Loverman*, where the character Barry and his family's actions are analysed to reveal how they defy the socioeconomic expectations traditionally associated with race. The concluding subchapter questions the depiction of poverty as a universal experience that transcends racial differences, comparing the characters' socioeconomic circumstances in *Small Island*. In brief, this chapter aims to illuminate the complex ways in which these three authors, representing the voices of Windrush women, depict, interrogate, and challenge the interconnected dynamics of race and class in war, postwar and contemporary Britain.

“I counting my ducats”: defying socioeconomic expectations

*Le peuple comprend que la richesse n'est pas le fruit du travail mais le résultat d'un vol organisé et protégé. Les riches cessent d'être des hommes respectables, ils ne sont plus que des bêtes carnassières, des chacals et des corbeaux qui se vautrent dans le sang du peuple.*³²

(Frantz Fanon 2002 [1961]: 182).

The socioeconomic divide in the United Kingdom, particularly when it comes to wealth and property ownership, is inextricably intertwined with race. In *The Colour of Money*, a report published in 2020 by the Runnymede Trust³³, Omar Khan, illustrates stark contrasts in economic wealth between Black and minority ethnic (BME³⁴) individuals and White British households. Specifically, Black African and Bangladeshi people on average possess savings that are ten times less than those of White British individuals. Black Caribbeans, though having slightly more wealth, amounting to about a fifth of White British, still fall significantly behind, a factor partially mitigated

³² “The people understand that wealth is not the fruit of labour but the result of organised and protected theft. The rich cease to be respectable men; they become nothing more than predatory beasts, jackals and crows that wallow in the blood of the people.” (my translation)

³³ Founded in 1968, a year marked by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr and Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech, the Runnymede Trust serves as a British think tank dedicated to race equality and civil rights. Established by Jim Rose and Anthony Lester, the Trust focuses on research, network building, and policy engagement to foster a multi-ethnic Britain.

³⁴ Khan's report does not provide explicit data on British Asians, which is why I am employing the term BME instead of BAME.

by pensions many receive from public sector employment. This divide is particularly pronounced in the field of real estate and, especially, home ownership. The Runnymede report reveals that the vast majority of Black British individuals, despite having rebuilt, worked in, and contributed to the public sector in postwar Britain, do not own their homes (Khan 2020: 13; Gregg & Kanabar 2022). Consequently, while individuals across the economic spectrum can be found in every ethnic group, statistical analysis suggests that racial background serves as a significant predictor for a person's financial standing in the United Kingdom. It follows that a prosperous individual belonging to a Black or minority ethnic (BME) group would constitute a statistical outlier, as underscored by the data examined in the report. As I argue subsequently, this marked divergence between racial identity and economic status not only emphasises the weight of ethnic factors in economic disparities but also calls for a deeper inquiry into the systemic elements that perpetuate these inequalities.

The term 'minority' is not monolithic when it comes to money: Considerable differences exist among individual ethnic groups with respect to the racial pay gap in Britain. In a comprehensive study commissioned by the Institute of Fiscal Studies in 2022, Heidi Safia Mirza and Imran Rasul explore the complex landscape of racial pay gaps, revealing that these disparities are not only persistent but also highly variable among different ethnic groups. In more specific terms, with regard to median weekly earnings among employees in 2019, Black Caribbean men earned 13% less compared to White British men. Even more pronounced were the income gaps for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men, whose earnings were 22% and 42% lower, respectively. By contrast, Indian men experienced a different financial trajectory, with median earnings that were 13% higher than their White British counterparts. This relative financial advantage is observed among both immigrant and UK-born Indian men, who have benefited from notable average wage growth over the years. By contrast, Black Caribbean men have not witnessed such wage progression (Mirza & Rasul 2022: 12). Consequently, disparities in income cannot be attributed solely to immigrant status or to being (perceived as) non-White. Rather, the findings of Mirza and Rasul's study suggest that there are complexities and idiosyncrasies of particular racial and ethnic financial disparities. These intricacies are most likely linked to a complex set of cultural factors. In more concrete terms, it seems increasingly likely that these financial gaps between immigrants – particularly those having roots in the

former colonies – are influenced by prejudices specifically targeting individual minority groups.

The pressing question that arises is: What are the root causes of this pronounced disparity in financial status among different ethnic groups? One factor that can serve as a hint is shifting the perspective on economic power: from income to wealth. According to Alessandra Radicati, Amelia Clayton and Sophie De Groot from the Young Foundation,

Looking at wealth instead of income, as a measure of inequality, can highlight longstanding systemic disparities between different ethnic groups, giving a fuller picture of economic inequality in the UK. Wealth is more complex than income. It assesses the value of all assets an individual owns, including property, savings, investments and pensions – whereas income refers to an amount of money made in a certain time, such as wages, salary and benefits (2023: 3).

Following Radicati, Clayton and De Groot's line of argumentation, wealth serves as a more nuanced and dependable barometer of both economic and social power than income alone. This observation becomes particularly poignant when contrasting the Runnymede Trust report with the Institute of Fiscal Studies' findings: While Black Caribbean men earn an average of 13% less than White British men, their wealth is, on average, a mere tenth of that held by their White British counterparts. In a divergent trend, the financial assets of Indian households reach between 90 to 95 percent of those of White British households, whereas the wealth of Pakistanis amounts to approximately half. It is evident that economic strength is less a mere consequence of current income and more intricately linked with the intergenerational accumulation of wealth. Black Caribbean and Black British individuals face a compounded challenge in accruing financial assets: Historically rooted in colonialism and discriminatory legal frameworks, their opportunity to inherit familial wealth is significantly curtailed to say the least. In contemporary society, neo-colonial influences and enduring racial biases further complicate asset building for Britain's Black population.

One contributing factor that could partially account for the wealth disparities between White and Black British communities, as well as among Black British and other ethnic minorities in Britain, is the historical and cultural impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It is noteworthy that the majority of individuals trafficked in this trade were of African descent: By the 18th century, the racially codified system had entrenched the terms 'African' and 'slave' as nearly synonymous in British

colonial territories, thereby contributing to systemic inequalities that continue to reverberate in modern times (Blackburn 1997; Patterson 1982). This is an important distinction from other ethnic minorities, seeing that while they were perceived as 'foreign', they were arguably not directly associated with the term 'slave' and thus, their work might have been valued more.

In the historical context of British colonialism, the acquisition of wealth for Black individuals was not merely challenging but systematically obstructed by White slave owners who – quite literally – stole the fruits of their labour. Fuelled by greed, many Whites who profited from slavery systematically stalled the process of abolition. While the Slave Trade Act of 1807 finally put a stop to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, it fell short of banning slave ownership. This legal lacuna was partially addressed by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833³⁵, albeit with an interim 'apprenticeship' system that perpetuated servitude under an alternative label (Oldfield 2021). Complete emancipation came into effect as late as 1838 due to widespread disdain for the apprenticeship scheme and the criticisms it received for continuing the institution of slavery by another name. However, while the year 1838 brought about the *de iure* abolition of slavery in the British Empire, the *de facto* situation was far more nuanced. Discrimination continued to thrive, effectively maintaining aspects of the previous system. Notably, former slaves (and Black people in general) often found themselves limited to jobs with paltry wages, barely sufficient for covering essentials such as rent, food, and clothing. In essence, the systematic oppression and exploitation of Black people in Britain did not end, but rather shapeshifted.

The abolition of slavery came at an enormous cost for everyone involved – apart from the slave owners themselves. In 1835, a substantial loan of 20 million pounds, equivalent to approximately 300 billion pounds in today's terms, was secured from the bankers Nathan Mayer Rothschild and Moses Montefiore. This sum was allocated to finance the slave compensation package mandated by the 1833 Act, repayments for which extended until as recently as 2015 (Manjapra 2018: 1f.). Strikingly, none of these funds were directed towards the enslaved individuals; rather, they were funnelled into the coffers of numerous White British families, many of whom continue to exert considerable influence in contemporary Britain. Among descendants of slave owners are William Gladstone, George Orwell, Richard Drax,

³⁵ Following the abolition of slavery, Britain also instituted a system of indentured labour, predominantly involving Indians, which, while distinct from chattel slavery, had its own set of harsh conditions and systemic inequalities (Carter & Torabully 2002; Look Lai 1993).

David Cameron, Ben Affleck, Benedict Cumberbatch. Furthermore, although the Royal Family never formally owned slaves, they significantly profited from the trade (Olusoga 2015; Lashmar & Smith 2020a; Lashmar & Smith 2020b; Thomas 2022; Lashmar & Smith 2023). These families continue to benefit from assets that are intrinsically tied to the exploitation of Black slaves. This entrenched disparity in wealth distribution stands as a testament to the lingering impacts of Britain's colonial legacy. As the economic chasm between the affluent and the impoverished continues to expand (ONS 2021b, Elliott 2021), systemic inequalities further solidify, exacerbating the social and racial divides rooted in historical injustice.

Considering the historical backdrop, the character Barry in *Mr Loverman* presents an intriguing deviation from conventional socioeconomic expectations. Despite migrating from Antigua to Britain, Barry has not only managed to amass wealth but has also enhanced his assets. With ownership of multiple properties, the foundation of his own enterprise, and significant holdings in both financial and cultural capital, Barry arguably occupies a position within the upper middle class, if not the upper echelons of British society. Although fully compliant with contemporary legal norms, Barry defies statistical representations and serves as a counterpoint to societal expectations in Britain – both with regard to economics and, as has been discussed in chapter three, to sexual desire. He is highly aware of his unusual position, which becomes clear when he recounts his initial attempts to secure a loan for the purchase, renovation, and leasing of dilapidated Victorian houses:

I'd already been thinking about how I could [...] defy the low expectations the *indigènes* had of us, exploit an economy that, compared to our poor-poor islands, was a financial paradise. [...] I was goin' be the exception to the rule. [...] But the banks never lent us no money in those days. Soon as you stepped over the threshold of your financial future, the manager's smile *glaciated*. Didn't matter how viable your proposal, how squeaky clean your finances, how impeccable your references, how speaky-spokey you was. [...] I left those banks with my mouth filled with the bile of bitter gourd. [...] [H]ad not our labour drip-fed plantation profits to this country for hundreds of years before manumission? Had not thousands of our young men fought in two world wars for this land? Were not we immigrants paying our taxes and making our way as good citizens of this country? (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 115f.; italics original)

Several aspects of this quote warrant scholarly attention: First of all, the protagonist Barry employs the term *indigènes* – French for 'indigenous' – to delineate the low expectations held by White British society towards members of the Windrush generation. The term itself possesses a layered history, both linguistically and

culturally: not only is it a linguistic import from France (and, consequently, from Latin), but it was also first employed by Europeans in colonial settings to differentiate slaves of African lineage from the indigenous peoples of the Americas (Browne 1646; Peters & Mika 2017). Barry's choice of wording becomes especially poignant in light of his intent to 'exploit' the economic system, subtly undermining and seeking to reconfigure the racialised power dynamics traditionally associated with wealth.

This narrative thread connects to a broader social issue in which Black individuals, especially those of Caribbean heritage, face persistent obstructions in economic self-empowerment in Britain. Discriminatory employment practices, prejudiced housing policies, and systemic inequalities in education and healthcare (Zwisen, Di Stasio & Heath LSE³⁶ British Politics and Policy 2021; Pegg & Evans 2021; TUC³⁷ 2022; Iacobucci BMJ³⁸ 2022) are among the impediments that have disproportionately affected and continue to affect Black communities. These real-world difficulties are reflected in another interesting aspect of Evaristo's literary work: the fact that despite Barry's good credentials, the bank refuses to give him a loan³⁹, a behaviour which he directly connects back to slavery. In an earlier chapter of the book, Barry states the link between restricting Black people to working manual labour and the upkeep of slavery – or at least highly discriminatory practices – under a different name when talking about the origins of Drusilla, a friend of Carmel: “Her father, Mr O’Neal, picked cotton on the Hermitage Estate, where he lived. *One step up from slavery, and where you’ll end up for sure* was what my father used to threaten me with any time I tried to shirk my homework” (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 48; italics original). Although in the novel, Barry is never subjected to the manual labour of cotton picking, emblematic of historical racial oppression, he clearly encounters discriminatory barriers when attempting to enter spheres traditionally reserved for influential White families, such as property ownership.

Considering Barry faces racial discrimination that thwarts his attempts to secure a regular loan, the following question arises: How does he manage to acquire properties and accumulate wealth in spite of these barriers affecting the Black community in Britain? The answer lies in accessing an alternative – arguably the only viable alternative – avenue for the initial capital infusion indispensable for launching

³⁶ London School of Economics.

³⁷ Trades Union Congress.

³⁸ British Medical Journal.

³⁹ A phenomenon which is by no means restricted to the literary world, given that firms owned by Black individuals are twice as likely to experience loan rejection. For more information, see Marks 2020.

his entrepreneurial venture: family wealth. Providentially, Francis Miller, the father of Barry's spouse, Carmen (née Miller), is in a position to furnish the requisite financial support. However, securing this loan from his father-in-law proves to be a complex undertaking in its own right, seeing that it comes with strings attached:

It took about a week of charming cajolement (in the days when that worked), brainwashing techniques and financial projections to convince Carmel that my plan wouldn't lead to our family's banishment to the workhouse, and to persuade her to ask her ole boy (who by this time was rapidly expanding his Early Bird empire into Montserrat, St Kitts, Barbados, Jamaica) to advance me the working capital.

It took many years to repay him, along with the 20 per cent interest that skinflint charged his very own son-in-law.

No, sah, I don't owe that man nothing. What is more and more furtherly, I hated having him bankroll me. I felt like a beggar, a real bottom-foot buckra. (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 116f.)

While Barry may be considered a lucky outlier in achieving financial success compared to most other Black Caribbean and Black British, his reliance on familial wealth in the form of a loan from Francis Miller ensnares him in a complex dependency network. This financial arrangement not only impacts his sense of self-efficacy ("I hated having him bankroll me. I felt like a beggar."), but also reinforces a hierarchical power dynamic: Barry initially has to work under the authority of a patriarchal figure before reaping any personal financial rewards. The protagonist of Evaristo's *Mr Loverman* thus embodies a paradox, being both the exception and the rule: he transcends systemic racial disadvantages by accumulating substantial wealth as a Black Caribbean immigrant, yet accomplishes this feat only by leveraging what is widely acknowledged as the most consistent predictor of economic success: family money.

“A multigenerational headache”: transgenerational cycles of poverty

Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is manmade, and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice.

(Nelson Mandela, cit. in Jeffery 2005: 6)

Just as wealth is often passed down from generation to generation, economic disadvantage is similarly perpetuated. This holds particular significance for the Black community in the United Kingdom: more than half of the UK's Black children live in poverty, a disproportionately high number of Black parents are lone parents, and on average, Black mothers have more children than their White counterparts (Sparrow 2022; ONS 2019). The socio-economic conditions of these families are further aggravated by a social system that strategically disadvantages the poor as well as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) households. A notable case in point is the 'two-child-limit policy,' aptly named “the worst social security policy ever” (Bradshaw 2017). Enacted on April 6, 2017, this policy mandates that the child element of financial aid is available solely for the first two children, unless a third or subsequent child was born before the policy's implementation. This restriction translates to a potential loss of up to £2935 per additional child annually (McKechnie 2022). Kitty Stewart, Aaron Reeves, and Ruth Patrick from the London School of Economics assert that, in light of this policy and additional austerity measures such as the cash freeze on working-age benefits from 2015-2020, Britain “must either embrace this interdependence or accept that only the wealthiest families should be able to have more than two children, and that high and rising numbers of children will grow up in poverty because of their family size” (2021: 14). Black households in Britain converge multiple risk factors, such as the tendency to have a greater number of children while simultaneously possessing less generational wealth. It follows that these families face a significantly higher risk of falling through the cracks.

The phenomenon of intergenerational poverty among BME communities in Britain is poignantly illustrated in Smith's novel, *Swing Time*, particularly through the character Tracey. As elaborated in section 2 of the current thesis, Tracey's upbringing is characterised by a series of adverse circumstances. Raised in a single-parent

household by her economically disadvantaged White mother, who struggles with alcoholism, Tracey also endures the sporadic and frequently violent appearances of her Black father. After their friendship falters multiple times⁴⁰, the protagonist eventually loses touch with Tracey. After several years, they finally reconnect not for social reasons, but to resolve a pressing issue: Tracey has been sending a series of damaging and scathing emails to Mother, who at that point is terminally ill with cancer and in hospice care. Determined to put an end to this harassment, the protagonist pays Tracey a visit which unveils a sobering reality: Tracey's life has taken a turn that closely mirrors her own late mother's circumstances, albeit possibly minus the alcoholism. She's stuck in a cycle of poverty, still living in the flat where she grew up, and struggling with single motherhood:

[S]he opened the door right away, a new baby of four or five months on her hip, its face turned from me. Behind her I could hear more children, arguing, and a TV on high volume. I don't know what I expected, but what was in front of my was an anxious, heavy-set, middle-aged woman in terrycloth pyjama bottoms, house slippers and a black sweatshirt that had one word written on it: OBEY. I looked so much younger (Smith 2016: 399f.)

This turn of events in Tracey's life serves as both a self-fulfilling prophecy and a life story that could fit into a Greek tragedy. She has essentially become a living example of the life that the protagonist's mother had gone to great lengths to avoid for herself. Unravelling the specific factors that lead Tracey, as well as a multitude of single mothers from BME backgrounds in Britain, into this cycle of poverty goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, in her influential book *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, bell hooks elucidates the historical and sociocultural underpinnings of this issue. She traces the phenomenon back to slavery, highlighting that:

From slavery on many black males have chosen to avoid parenting [...] Until black people of all classes are able to place value on the active participation of black males in parenting, black boys and young men will continue to believe that their purpose is simply to sire children, that they prove their manhood in a patriarchal sense by making babies, not by taking care of them. (hooks 2004: 98f.)

In essence, bell hooks establishes a link between the systemic absence of Black fathers in parenting roles and long-standing patriarchal frameworks, many tracing their roots to the era of slavery and colonialism. These structures, in turn, perpetuate the cycles of single motherhood and economic deprivation within the Black British community. Literary representations of this phenomenon are not limited to Tracey's

⁴⁰ See, for instance, chapter three of the present thesis.

narrative arc, which culminates in her having children with three different fathers of diverse racial backgrounds. Another example is found in Evaristo's *Mr Loverman*, where Barry characterises the father of Carmel's friend Drusilla as follows: "O'Neal had seventeen children by five women. He must-a felt like a real man. Only way he could" (Evaristo 2020 [2013]: 48). The portrayal of O'Neal in Evaristo's narrative serves as a compelling counterpoint to Tracey's life journey in Smith's work: While the former represents a Black male who attempts to assert his masculinity through prolific procreation absent any commitment to childcare, the latter embodies a Black female who bears the repercussions of such actions. They cannot be seen and studied in separation, but are – simply put – but two sides of the same coin.

The notion of impregnating a woman to feel like a 'real man' is inherently connected to previously discussed themes in this thesis: the use of sexual intercourse as an instrument of power over women, as theorised by Andrea Dworkin, and the systemic devaluation of Black masculinity when contrasted with White hegemonic masculinity. This serves to underscore the complex interrelation of race, gender, and class. To put it simplistically, Black men, often marginalised in a culture that perpetuates colonial value systems, may resort to an overemphasis on procreation, primarily with Black women. These women then frequently find themselves ensnared in the challenges of single motherhood, often employed in low-wage sectors and living in conditions of poverty. While this interpretation is far from exhaustive, it does provide a lens through which the issues depicted in the works of Windrush women writers may be appreciated.

“Many English live worse than us”: poverty as the great equaliser

*Tell me again
bout de big island
an de small island,
bout de rich island
an de poor island, [...]
how we have plenty dollars
but no sense,
an how money is no problem
but de problem is no money,
tell me again.*

– Paul Keens-Douglas (1986 [2005]: 118f.)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the United Kingdom grappled with a myriad of challenges associated with its reconstruction. Perhaps the most pressing issue of all was the acute labour shortage, underscored by a dire need for rebuilding the nation (Rolfe 1954: 354). Said shortage was predominantly attributed to the substantial loss of life and the number of individuals, primarily male, left incapacitated as a consequence of the war. Initially, the Labour government sought to ameliorate this crisis by inviting White Europeans. Despite a positive response, particularly from Poland and Italy, these immigrant populations were insufficient to fully mitigate the labour deficit (McDowell 2018: 3). In light of these circumstances, the British government reluctantly expanded its invitation to include citizens of the Commonwealth, particularly from the West Indies, as a strategy to revitalise the country. In 1948, the introduction of the British Nationality Act, labelled as the "world's most liberal immigration regime" (Hansen & King 2000: 398), set the legal framework for what later came to be known as the Windrush generation. It follows that the outreach to Caribbean Commonwealth countries originated not from an ethos of multicultural inclusivity or a revisionist stance towards colonial legacies, but rather from an acute economic necessity.

Many West-Indians, predominantly young men in their 20s and 30s, answered the call, hoping for a better life. They primarily did crucial work in the field of infrastructure and transportation as well as in healthcare, given that the newly

founded NHS needed staffing and hired West Indians as, *inter alia*, nurses, midwives, and cleaners (James 2022: 2). In essence, they were promised good, stable lives and the possibility to grow and profit from the country becoming wealthier again. For a moment, it might have seemed as though the postwar poverty functioned as a levelling force between racial communities: Both White Britons and the Caribbean immigrants found themselves grappling with hardships during this period. While the former dealt with the financial fallout of a cataclysmic war, the latter arrived from a region known for its economic limitations. Both communities were buoyed by the promise of building a better future. This shared aspiration for upward mobility as well as the belief that poverty affects all races equally find literary representation in the characters of Gilbert and Hortense in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*. Gilbert, in an attempt to put Hortense's complaints about their modest living arrangements into perspective, observes that many White British actually live in even more humble conditions than they do:

"This is it, Hortense. This is the room I am living!"

Three steps would take me to one side of this room. For steps could take me to another. There was a sink in the corner. a rusty tap stuck out from the wall above it. There was a table with two chairs – one with its back broken – pushed up against the bed. The armchair held a shopping bag, a pyjama top, and a teapot. In the fireplace the gas hissed with a blue flame.

"Just this?" I had to sit on the bed. My legs gave way. There was no bounce underneath me as I fell. "Just this? This is where you are living? Just this?"

"Yes, this is it." [...] "What you expect, woman? Yes, just this! What you expect? Everyone live like this. There has been a war. Houses bombed. I know plenty people live worse than this. What you want? [...] There been a war here. Everyone live like this." (Levy 2022 [2004]: 20f.)

Gilbert's observation holds merit: by the end of the Second World War, a significant number of White Britons, particularly those situated in the lower tiers of the social hierarchy, had endured conditions of poverty and austerity for an extended period. Even Queenie, the landlady of Gilbert and Hortense, lives in conditions that are only slightly better than those of her Black tenants. Faced with this reality, Hortense struggles to align her preconceived notions of the 'Mother Country' with her actual experiences. While the text does not explicitly state Gilbert's perspective on the matter, it is reasonable to infer that he, upon seeing what the ostensibly 'great economic opportunities' promised to young, fit Jamaicans in England really looked like, had a similar reaction. In light of these experiences, both characters appear to be gradually peeling away at the façade of British nationalism, which Hall defines as,

a narrative of nation in which a set of legends, images, landscapes, and scenarios, as well as historical events, symbols, and rituals, all came to represent a unified story that served as a container for the shared experiences, griefs, sorrows, divisions, disasters, and triumphs of the people as they positioned themselves within, and came to be positioned by, such discourses of national belonging. It is this "story" that gives meaning to the nation as a world of meaning that constructs identification precisely because it helps us to see ourselves in the imaginary as somehow sharing in an overarching collective narrative [which], in this sense, thus always projects "Englishness" or "Americanness" *out* of real time, *out* of the conflicts and discontinuities, *out* of the unevenness and differences that compose the actual state of the nation and the peoples of its history, and *into* a timeless register of mythic time. (Hall 2017: 138f.; italics original)

The myth of the 'Mother Country' is, in my reading, as much part of the discourse of British nationalism as it is of colonialism: The United Kingdom essentially presented a highly specific, glorified version of itself to the colonies with two possible aims: First of all, Britain portrayed itself as the more developed, naturally superior country. This is even inherent in the language used, given that through the denomination 'Mother Country', an ostensibly hierarchical parent-child relationship is established. Secondly, the discourse around British nationalism establishes a link between the nation's (former) colonial territories and the Commonwealth countries, implying that they are part of this mythological narrative, but not as equals but as second-class citizens.

The enactment of the British Nationality Act brought with it the possibility for a change in this power dynamic. It promised a scenario that, according to Frantz Fanon, every colonial subject fantasises about: "s'asseoir à la table du colon, coucher dans le lit du colon, avec sa femme si possible [...] il n'y a pas un colonisé qui ne rêve au moins une fois par jour de s'installer à la place du colon"⁴¹ (Fanon 2002 [1961]: 39). This is not to suggest that characters like Gilbert and Hortense aim to colonise England. Instead, when the United Kingdom extends an invitation to West Indians, promising shared economic prosperity, Black individuals from the (former) colonies like Gilbert and Hortense perceive it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: Finally invited to the superior 'Mother Country', finally treated as equal to the (former) colonisers, finally receiving a seat at the proverbial table.

⁴¹ "To sit at the coloniser's table, to sleep in the coloniser's bed, with his wife if possible [...] there is not a single colonised person who does not dream at least once a day of taking the place of the coloniser" (my translation).

Reevaluating its colonial past and offering Commonwealth citizens a share of the prosperity they were generating were, however, never the primary intention of the migration policies in postwar Britain. The principal impetus was, rather, self-interest coupled with a pressing need for rapid economic recovery. This is evident in the media narratives of the period, where immigrants coming from the West Indies were frequently described as 'visitors' – invited to contribute to the labour force, yet not welcome to establish permanent residence (McDowell 2018; Saroukhani 2023). Hence, the answer to the question *cui bono?* with regards to mass immigration from the Caribbean was crystal clear from the beginning: The primary beneficiary was not the community of Black immigrant workers, but the British economy, which was – and still is – firmly in the hands of White men.

Gilbert's observation in *Small Island* holds a nugget of truth regarding the initial socio-economic circumstances: Both White and Black communities are grappling with poverty, largely attributable to the enormous human and financial toll of the war. However, this initial parallel in struggle between the races quickly begins to diverge as the decades roll on, leading to a widening gap in social and economic capital between members of the Windrush generation and their White contemporaries. The exact underlying reasons for this development are exceedingly complex, but the phenomenon on a more abstract level could be connected to what Fanon describes as “un capitalisme acculé au camouflage et qui se pare aujourd'hui du masque néo-colonialiste⁴²” (Fanon 2002 [1961]: 149). Following his line of argumentation, the colonialist power hierarchy that, in simplified terms, situates Black Caribbeans at the bottom and White British on top finds a new guise in the predominant economic system that recreates, legitimises, and, ultimately, perpetuates it: capitalism.

In essence, the Windrush generation and its descendants faced systemic inequities that placed them at an inherent disadvantage. Both the White population and, at least to some extent, other immigrant demographics, namely those less directly associated with the legacy of slavery, capitalised on the economic prosperity of the postwar era. The Windrush generation, however, seldom reaped the full benefits of their invaluable contributions to labour and society. As a result, a substantial portion of this community and their descendants found – and continue to find – themselves ensnared in a persistent cycle of poverty. Revisiting the metaphor

⁴² “A capitalism driven to camouflage, which today dons the mask of neo-colonialism” (my translation).

above, it thus appears that upon arrival in Britain, the Windrush generation was not only refused a seat at the proverbial table as well as opportunities for economic growth and self-emancipation, but also degraded to subservient roles to ensure the maintenance of the imperial status quo.

5. Conclusion

Drawing from intersectional, feminist and postcolonial theories, the present thesis explored the (de)construction and subversion of literary Windrush identities that lie at a crossroads between markers of difference such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, Bernadine Evaristo's *Mr Loverman*, and Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* have served as the primary objects of analysis, the reason being that each text contributes unique temporal, social, and individual perspectives. This textual diversity has allowed for a more comprehensive and nuanced examination of Windrush experiences.

The first chapter, 'A Life Between Islands', sets the stage by establishing the historical context of the Windrush. It touches upon Britain's colonial history and explains that the Windrush scandal is, essentially, one of the legacies of British Imperialism. By delving into the human stories beneath the political veneer, literature not only provides a collective platform for the marginalised voices but also a lens through which the societal impact of these historical and political legacies can be examined and understood. This information served as an essential framework for the analyses performed in the subsequent chapters.

The following section, called 'A Woman Without Child is Like a Tree Without Fruit', is subdivided into two main parts. The first, 'Black Femininities', explores various dimensions of the Black female experience in Britain as portrayed in the novels that serve as objects of analysis, including the negotiation between financial imperatives and familial obligations, as well as the transformative role of education. Essentially, I have argued that, at least in these literary portrayals, Black women can never quite get it right: if they meet societal expectations, they find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle that perpetuates poverty and violence, as is illustrated in the life and character of Tracey. If they choose an alternative path, they are either viewed as failures due to their childfree lives (e.g., the protagonist), or, if they pursue

their (academic) interests despite having children, they are stylised as bad mothers (e.g., the protagonist's mother).

The second part, 'Black Masculinities', dives deeply into issues like power dynamics, the absence of fathers, and how institutions perpetuate gender-specific violence. Here, I argue that *au fond*, the majority of problems that Black British men – or rather, their literary representations – face, can be traced back to power imbalances and the resulting struggles. In more concrete terms, Black men do not meet the criteria of hegemonic masculinity and are therefore often excluded from many privileges granted by the patriarchy. Instead of creating an alternative, healthy ideal of success that they can actually achieve, they compensate for this discrimination by seeking to gain status through alternative, often illegal or detrimental, means. For instance, while some Black men resort to stealing to access some degree of wealth, Bachir – despite being unemployed – feigns financial success by flashing his oversized electronic devices and wearing a suit everywhere he goes. Others (e.g., Tracey's lovers) impregnate as many women as possible, believing that there is power in procreation, but not in caring fatherhood.

Transitioning to Chapter Three, titled 'I am not Homosexual, I am Barrysexual', the focus has shifted from gender to sexuality and desire. This chapter has dissected heteronormative expectations in Black communities, how racial narratives shape sexual agency as well as power relations, and relationships that transgress traditional boundaries, in particular in connection to homosexuality. Another topic investigated in chapter three has been the discourse surrounding sexual entitlement and the power hierarchies connected to it, Black women, and the sexual heritage of slavery. Here, I argued that, at least in the novels analysed in this thesis, homosexuality is portrayed as a 'White disease' and thus frowned upon by many Black communities, and particularly by Black churches. In other words, Black gays such as Barry face elevated levels of discrimination because of their particular combination of race and sexual desire. In addition, I argued that the sexualisation and objectification of Black women harks back to colonialism, where their bodies were fetishised and stylised as lascivious, 'natural', and ever-ready to be consumed by their White male masters. In addition, I have also shown that Black sexuality is viewed as a threat that needs containing, and that the power relations in some of the intimate relationships in the books analysed (e.g., Aimée and Lamin) are reminiscent of those between master and slave in the colonial era.

Rounding out the analytical portion, Chapter Four, 'A Terrific Instinct for Middle-Class Mores', has turned the lens toward social class and mobility in connection with race and gender. This chapter has questioned common stereotypes about Black prosperity, looked at the long-lasting impact of generational poverty, and critically evaluated the idea that poverty can sometimes level the social playing field among different ethnic groups. In more concrete terms, I assert that economic discrimination against Black individuals, as depicted in the novels analysed, finds its origins in the era of British colonialism and the Triangular Trade. Similarly, I have reasoned that Black transgenerational poverty is intrinsically connected to the absence of Black fathers, which in turn harks back to the systemic devaluation of Black masculinities. Lastly, I have argued that while both Black and White communities in Britain may be poor, the former are systematically disadvantaged through the (neo)colonial remnants embedded in capitalism.

My thesis fulfils a dual role that spans both academic and societal domains: Adding to the existing corpus of scholarship in postcolonial and Black intersectional feminist studies, this inquiry aims to carve out a unique niche by investigating the works of three Black British women authors. Sourcing its theory framework as well as the primary literature chiefly from Black theorists and novelists, the study has critically positioned itself in relation to dominant cultural narratives and strived to achieve a nuanced understanding that is aligned with the realities of the communities studied.

Within academia, this study has contributed to the discourse surrounding the intersection of markers of difference such as gender, race, class, and sexual desire in the context of Windrush literature. The goal of my work has been to render the complexities that result from various combinations of markers of difference visible so as to contribute to a more profound understanding of the power hierarchies at play. Coming from a family that, merely two generations ago, grappled with the adverse effects resulting from the interplay between poverty and a migrant background, I firmly believe that research such as mine is vital. It serves as a compelling testament to the fact that, despite the veneer of equality maintained by many contemporary European states, the playing field is all but level: it is designed to preserve the status quo and impede social mobility.

Outside of scholarly realms, my work's relevance extends to broader so-political contexts, comparing the depictions in the literature analysed to real-world statistics, historical data, and recent articles from popular media. By establishing

these connections, my thesis not only bridges the gap between academic research and popular narratives but also highlights the nuances and complexities of Black British identities. Realising academia's 'third mission', it thus strives to expand beyond scholarly discourse to inform public conversations about the Windrush generation that continue to evolve.

While the present thesis aims to provide a thorough and nuanced analysis of the works of Levy, Evaristo, and Smith, certain limitations have emerged. For instance, its scope: By examining solely on three Black British women authors, this thesis can impossibly capture the full range of perspectives and experiences of the Windrush generation and their descendants. Furthermore, while the paper at hand is informed by intersectional, feminist, and postcolonial theories, it acknowledges that these frameworks themselves are subjects of ongoing debate and refinement. Thus, they offer just one perspective among many through which to interpret these complex narratives. Furthermore, the qualitative methodology employed here, while well-suited to the aims of the study, has not generated any new empirical data, thereby limiting the types of conclusions that can be drawn. Lastly, the focus on the Windrush generation and their descendants, although crucial, inevitably leaves out other significant diasporic experiences that also contribute to the complexity of Black British identity.

Rather than diminish the contributions of this research, these limitations serve as catalysts for future inquiry, inviting broader perspectives and diversified methodologies to further deepen understanding of the subject matter. Put in different, slightly more poetic words, while this academic voyage has shed light on several important issues, there are many uncharted waters left to explore. As this thesis drops anchor, it does so with the understanding that it forms part of an ongoing, critical conversation – a waypoint in the larger voyage to better understand the complexities of Black British history, literature and culture.

32597 words.

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