

## RACE, GENDER AND EDUCATIONAL DESIRE

### Abstract

In the government, media, and public mind the relationship between 'race' and education is overwhelmingly negative. In Britain when we talk of 'black and ethnic minorities in schools' we think of underachievement, rising exclusions and low aspirations. However, research evidence shows racialised people, particularly the women, have a positive and enduring relationship with education. Drawing on historical, archival, personal and research evidence, this article, which is drawn for the text of an inaugural professorial lecture, looks at the pervasive myths behind the link between 'race and education' and asks, "*Why is there a crisis in 'multicultural education' in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain?*" The author argues that by understanding the black and Asian collective desire for education, we can begin to reclaim the meaning of education, reinstating it as a radical site of resistance and refutation, so evident in the postcolonial experience.

## **RACE, GENDER AND EDUCATIONAL DESIRE**

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## **RACE, GENDER AND EDUCATIONAL DESIRE**

### **Introduction**

The text for this paper is taken from a spoken lecture<sup>1</sup>. As such it is a personal retrospective that seeks to move our understanding of educational inequality forward by examining what appears to be disparate, but intimately linked issues and discourses. Through the lens of gendered autobiography the paper brings together the dynamics of racist educational policy and practice in Britain in the context of the shadow of colonial history and migration. Finally it reflects on subsequent black strategies of transcendence and overcoming and their struggle for equality through education. It is written in a reflexive and rhetorical style addressing the reader directly, which is characteristic of traditional story telling.

This paper centres around three consuming issues which I address in my academic work. The intersection of 'race', gender and the relationship this has with educational aspirations, what I call 'educational desire'. Reflecting on my scholarship over the last 25 years I realise it has been underpinned by a need to ask a fundamental question, "Why is it that those who are the most committed to education often struggle the most to succeed?" To answer this question, I bring together seven stories of educational desire.

Telling stories is traditional in many cultures. The African Griot or story teller uses the oral tradition to pass on tales from generation to generation. In India the Hindu Ramayana, with its miracle plays and parables tells epic stories of the battle between the Gods for good and evil. In the academic world we use critical race theory which is based on situational and reflexive knowledge to illuminate hidden or marginal social realities. Stories are a powerful way to talk.

### **Story 1: The Quilt**

Recently I have been to India, a pilgrimage of sorts, to find my health and my roots! I went to Tamil Nadu at the southern most tip of India. This is the place of my ancestors. 160 years ago they were brought by the British as indentured labourers to work on the sugar plantations in Trinidad. This was the "new slavery". Hidden in the history of Empire, the trail took impoverished Indians on the so called 'curry trail' to

Malaysia, Mauritius, Fiji , Kenya, South Africa, and Central America (*Caribbean Quarterly* 1986: Ramdin 1999)

**Picture 1 about here**

In Tamil Nadu I met women who weaved and stitched. In the shameful face of vast capitalist profits of high street shops this woman made cloth for less than a dollar a day. She was so proud of her craft and showed me her loom where she sat for 12 hours a day. She asked for a pen for her children's schooling. She touched my soul. Why is education so important? A way up, a way out, a way to transform your life? What is the relationship between the marginal and dispossessed and the desire for education as transformation? I needed to know. I needed to find the answer.

**Picture 2 about here**

On that trip I brought a beautiful quilt, a tapestry made of fragments of bridal dresses worn by the women who made it. Who are they and what is their story? Quilting is the art of stitching together pieces of cloth, fragments of memory, linking the past to the present and making it whole (Flannery 2001). This has a powerful meaning for women across cultures and time. The women are marginal on the peripheries of their societies, yet in slow painstaking silent rhythm they take scraps of cloth making patterns for us to see. With care, warmth, and love they rework the quilt over and over again, remaking their story. The batting and back layers are unseen, but without them the patches have no foundation. When we stand back and look at their finished quilt the whole experience becomes coherent.

*Black British Feminism* ( Mirza 1997) the framework that has inspired me, is like the quilt. It is about situated knowledges, building a framework for understanding whose stories we hear or choose to hear in the construction of our reality. The hidden voice of the women or the dominant paradigm of the powerful? We hear of policies, plans and acts of parliament but what can we see if we look at things differently? In so doing how can we build a new science of critical understanding that centres gender and 'race' as a critical space? *Black British Feminism* asks critical questions about processes, relationships and power from the stand point of women who are rarely seen and heard. We map hidden patterns in subjugated and suppressed knowledge, illuminate 'other ways of knowing.'

In this paper I want to unpick the stitches and look beneath the patches, see the backing, and hear the voices which tell stories of educational desire among tails of educational despair in the women's struggle for themselves and their children.

## **Story 2: The Caribbean Awakening**

### ***Picture 3 about here***

I never met my Trinidadian Grandmother. I was born in Britain and by the time I went as a child to Trinidad aged 4 she had already passed away. I only heard folk tales of her indomitable spirit, excellent cooking and powerful singing voice. Every one loved her. She was mother earth! I thought this is a good place to start excavating my feminist roots for this paper. In Trinidad last Christmas I visited a contemporary of my Grandmother, Mrs Nobbee, now 92. She told me my Grandmother had been the force behind the founding of one the most prestigious girls schools on the north of the Island, St Augustine Girls. I went to the sister school in the south of the Island Naparima Girls. This picture here is how I remember it. These were Presbyterian schools initiated by the Canadian missionaries, who begun their work, educating training and converting when the first indentured Hindus and Muslims arrived in the Caribbean in the 1860s.

### ***Picture 4 about here***

Yet it was my Grandfather, one of the first local men to become a Christian minister on the island, who is remembered as a social reformer in our history. Not my Grandmother, not his wife Theresa, one of the first 'bible women' who travelled the island to teach catechism to daughters of impoverished labourers, like herself. I was indignant and excited by this revelation! My grandmother must have been a feminist like me! A kindred spirit!

But the things Mrs Nobbee told me did not fit my neat paradigm. She told a proud and different story of women's campaigning, not a story of radical women fighting for radical change. But a story about women working within the system. Conservative, traditional tropical 'genteel' women, schooled in Victorian colonial manners. They were trained to be good accomplished wives and mothers who cooked, sewed and sung hymns while doing algebra and Latin. They worked with the men to do the

negotiating, and never asked, or got recognition. Women like my Grandmother were transformative agents and educators. They worked not against the grain but within and along side the mainstream, in order to challenge and change from within the structures and institutions in which they found themselves. As women they are too often forgotten souls in history of time.

This theme of radicalism and conservatism is one that courses through Caribbean and Asian educational experiences in the UK. It is the tension that determines the juxtaposition of the patches in the quilt, where we put them, how we construct social reality on our educational journey. Notions of resistance are nearly always masculine. Our ideas of social change are often about confrontation and clamour, gladiators and heroes, the men that lead the movements, like my Grandfather, not about quiet women's work like my Grandmother's. In the USA when we think of Civil Rights we think of the charismatic Martin Luther King. But it was Ella Baker's 'Learning by Doing' literacy programme that stretched across the nation powering the drive for voter registration<sup>2</sup>. In South Africa we hail Nelson Mandela is but it is the women who are the backbone of the everyday struggle in the townships. The amazing unsung women who work the health care trains that criss-cross the country in the battle against AIDS, educating as they go<sup>3</sup>.

In the UK there are thousands of women and mothers who give up every weekend to teach their children in the black community. Often becoming ill with over work, they are the vanguards of change in their important work to 'raise the race'. This is what Diane Reay and I found when we did our research on black supplementary schools (Reay and Mirza 1997). These schools are amazing places, set up by and for the black community to 'supplement' the failing education system, they are hidden from the mainstream. They are autonomous, getting little or no state funding yet working alongside the mainstream. These schools have been core grassroots black organisations since the 1970's. Here is a rare picture from this time.

***Picture 5 about here***

Set up against the odds in cold church halls, damp basements, and dilapidated houses they thrived with the support of the black church and the overwhelming commitment of the parents. Armies of black women have worked along side men to fuel this radical movement, which was often seen by the authorities as separate,

dangerous 'black power' places. But what is clear is that these schools are much more than response to mainstream failure. They are spaces of hope and transcendence underpinned by invisible women's work. They present the paradox of what appears to be radical separate black provision operating as a mechanism for mainstream educational inclusion. On one hand we found the schools work to 'fit in' and build a dialogue with the mainstream schools and the curriculum. With a traditional and often disciplinarian focus on the 3 'R's, ('reading, writing and arithmetic'), they have been seen to be buying into the conservative ideas of 'back to basics',<sup>4</sup> 'formal is best', and the instrumental meritocratic ideal of gaining educational credentials.

On the other hand the women are also radical. They provide an alternative world with different meaning and what we have called 'other ways of knowing'. The women in our study talk of the 'joy' of what they do, their work 'to raise the race' and the 'gift of giving back'. In their stance against racism, the teachers have developed a radical pedagogy that centres on black history and knowledge. These schools are places where whiteness is displaced and blackness becomes the norm, creating a sanctuary for the black child in which he or she is celebrated and re-centred. In the same way my Grandmother was both racial and conservative in her approach to education so too are these black women. It is a strategy borne from their understanding of the value of education in the struggle for group survival. In their space on the margin they operate between under and alongside the mainstream educational and labour market structures, renaming and reclaiming opportunities for their children, and in the process subverting racist expectations and beliefs. In this sense education is a transformative mantel – a Golden Fleece.

### **Story 3. The Golden Fleece**

In the Greek myth 'Jason and the Argonauts', Jason goes in search of the Golden Fleece, it is a journey of courage, love, and endurance, which, at the end, transforms him and makes him King. I heard a touching story about a Nigerian father who told his son to go to England and get educated. "Leave" he said, "go in search of the Golden Fleece". I think the idea of a Golden Fleece, a journey that transforms your life, is a useful way for us to think about the postcolonial educational experience.

**Picture 6 about here**

My Father and Mother were part of the post-war migration to Britain. My Mother came from Austria. My Father from Trinidad. He was part of what John La Rose the black activist and author calls the 'heroic generation' (La Rose 1999). We have heard of the *Empire Windrush*,<sup>5</sup> but there were many other ships and my father came on the less romantically named *Colombie* – which he told me was a real banana boat! He arrived in December 1950 and to keep warm he took hot showers in his bed-sit. His theory was the hot and cold made him lose his hair! He struggled to get into college, get a job and raise his family. It was a difficult time of overt racism. "No blacks, no dogs, no Irish" was the landlord's slogan of the day. He had a Muslim name and even in the 1950s, 50 years before the wave of Islamophobia after September 11, he had to change his surname to protect us, get a job and get a house. In the 2005 my daughter too had to do the same, change her Muslim name just to get a job interview.

White women, like my Mother, who married black men, those 'dark strangers' (Patterson 1965), are the silent heroes of this generation. They were true pioneers, those who crossed over in another way. They too have a story to tell of racism and transcendence, of love and care for their children. My Mother protected her children's identity and made me understand both sides to my heritage. She gave me what the African American writer Ralph Ellison describes in his book, *The Invisible Man*, (1965:15) 'the gift to see around corners'. The ability to see things differently. Their story of mothering work to shape a new generation of 'dual heritage' children is one that is largely forgotten in the post colonial story on diaspora and displacement. It is she who gave me the desire for education- the quest of the Golden Fleece.

Some times you read a book that transforms your life. My book was not a inspirational novel or a grand Shakespearian tome. It was an ordinary text book we used on my undergraduate degree course in Development Studies at the University of East Anglia in 1978.<sup>6</sup> It was called *The Diploma Disease* by Ronald Dore (1976). The irony was that a book about the narrow goal of education and the instrumentalism of qualification getting in countries like Trinidad opened up my thinking about the possibilities of education as transformative. What was my father chasing when he came to Britain? Was it education for bureaucratic self-advancement or knowledge to transform his newly independent country? Were his motives radical or conservative? Can education be revolutionary or is it always about



containment? I went back to my school in South London, near Brixton to do a PhD and find some answers.

In *Young Female and Black* ( Mirza 1992), the book from that study, I found that second generation young Caribbean working class women appeared to deeply identify with the ideology of meritocracy. On the surface they wanted to climb the career ladder and were seeking academic success through getting more and more qualifications.

But as I dug deeper I found their motivation was not simply driven by a desire for educational credentials. They were engaged in a strategic rationalisation of their schooling. The schools they were in were poorly resourced and teaching was stretched. The young women sat in the back of the classroom and got on with their work. They often pretended to not be working, but did their home work. Most of all they had to stay on longer and go to college to achieve academic success.

They are driven by what I have called 'educational urgency', a desire to succeed against the odds. Ironically because the young women's aspirations were linked to the growing gendered labour market they could do Access Courses in social work or nursing, which opened a path onto a degree. In this way they could climb the ladder into further and higher education. A kind of 'backdoor entry' which was not often available to young men in the same way. For them, like in the post colonial experience, education was linked to job opportunities. But here-in lies the difference. They were no longer in the Caribbean they were in the UK, and their experience was deeply racialised in a particular way. I found they were forging new identities. Identities that were grounded in a refusal to be quantified as failures, what *The Sunday Times* has called the 'Ms Dynamite' phenomenon<sup>7</sup>.

They were not, as is assumed in theorising about black female success, building on strong role models of their mothers and grandmothers. Neither were they resisting through accommodating the system, as many have also argued<sup>8</sup>. Their educational stance was much more related to the context in which they were in, what was actually happening to them in Britain. Indeed it had happened to me. When I came to England at sixteen I was deemed a failure. They said I couldn't speak English and put me down a year. They even thought I cheated when I passed my entrance exams with flying colours. I had to remake my identity to succeed. I learnt to speak like

them. But like bell hooks the black feminist writer, I too kept alive in my heart and mind 'other ways of knowing' when I moved from the margin to the centre ( hooks 1990:150).

You may ask how can I claim educational urgency when so many young people are being failed at school? But young black and Asian people are nearly 3 times more likely to be in university than their white counterparts. Though they are only 6 % of the working population they make up 15% of students ( NAO 2002)<sup>9</sup>. Black and minority ethnic women are the highest participants of all - 60% are in higher education, as are 48 % of ethnic minority men<sup>10</sup>. I am privileged to teach many of these students here at Middlesex University. Young black women appear to transcend many obstacles and work their way through the cracks of educational opportunity in Britain. But what if these cracks are closing? A recent study by *The Sutton Trust* shows there has been little social mobility through educational routes since the 1970s ( Blandon et al 2005). The expansion of higher education has benefited the middle classes, those who can afford to make choices. With the scrapping of grants, increasing tuition fees, and the realities of long term debt- educational desire- the sheer motivation to succeed, is not enough if the structures and systems mitigate against you.

Many 'top down' schemes such as *Widening Participation*<sup>11</sup> have been put in place to remedy the class bias in higher education- as Diane Reay, Miriam David, and Stephan Ball (2005) show in their new book on the subject. These schemes focus on motivating black and working class students to come in with the promises of access and support as the mechanism for change. But what about the cultural context of learning in ethnic communities? What about the complex interrelationship of educational desire linked to increasing debt? The issues are structural not cultural. Inequalities are now inbuilt into the monolithic educational market system. You may want the Golden Fleece, but now it is more illusive than ever.

#### **Story 4: The Motherland**

This is a hard story to tell, it is the story of racism and xenophobia in Britain. It is the backing on the quilt, the part we don't like to see but is always there giving shape to everything else. In this story we begin by asking 'How do mothers and fathers protect their children in a place where you are told you don't belong? How do young black

and Asian people, from Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Nigeria, Iran, Caribbean, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, live and go to school in a place where the subliminal messages are that we scrounge, take what is not ours, steal the housing, health, and education? How do you protect your children and feel safe in a country where young people are still killed for simply being black like Stephen Lawrence<sup>12</sup>, among many others? How do you keep your dignity in a country where they spit at you in the street, where they whisper Paki under their breath (something I know about)?'

In this story of the Motherland, the Britain to which we came, Denise Lewis and Kelly Holmes, our black female Olympians may wrap themselves in the British flag, and we may celebrate 'Our Multiculturalism' with Chicken Tikka Masala, but as Gary Younge writes in the Guardian on the elections and immigration, there is still no sense of a truly inclusive Britishness<sup>13</sup>. In *The Commission for the Future of Multi Ethnic Britain*, Bhikhu Parekh calls for a 'Community of Communities' in which we have shared values, but also have group concessions to wear the hijab or eat halal meat (Runnymede Trust 2000). But as the black cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2000) observes, in reality we are in a state of 'multicultural drift'. A haphazard and piecemeal resentful acceptance of the ethnic post colonial presence. Now on the Census you can tick the box to be 'Black British' and 'Asian British' (what ever that means), but after four generations here we are still not plain old English, Scottish or Welsh. This is the tightrope of multiculturalism, a balancing act. As the black feminist Sara Ahmed (2004) has eloquently argued multiculturalism is a 'love/ hate' relationship. If you show 'love' for the nation by not rejecting its 'hospitality', if you are not too different, not too outstanding, don't make too many claims- like insisting on wearing your hijab- you can be embraced and tolerated. All can belong in a state of 'mutual tolerance' as Roy Jenkins once famously said<sup>14</sup>, if you accept the common norms, sign up for the citizenship test<sup>15</sup> and support the English cricket team<sup>16</sup>.

In the British Council Lecture on Britishness, Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer talks of the golden thread that runs through Britishness<sup>17</sup>. The thread of liberty, tolerance, fair play, social justice and the rule of law. But, he argues, the shame of post-imperial national economic decline hangs like a shadow over any proud sense of celebrating these threads. This is what Paul Gilroy calls the British condition of melancholia (Gilroy 2004). This is the backward looking nostalgia for Britain of old. The harking back to Empire and return to greatness is a place where Britishness is stuck, unable to see the true 'multiculture' that has always been at its

heart. But what of the lives, bodies, and souls upon which this so called greatness was built? In the context of colonial oppression, slavery, indenture, racism and discrimination what is the meaning of fair play, tolerance, and the rule of law? How can we conceive of fair play when for 40 years there has been a press and media barrage against you and your kind?

30 years ago in 1970 *The Financial Times* head-line read, 'Drowned by coloured flood' in response to the Ugandan and Kenyan migrants. In 1978, the headline 'Stem the Tide of Migrants' graced *The Evening News* in response to new rules to curb the numbers of so called 'bogus' and illegal immigrants. The new rules unbelievably led to the virginity testing of Asian women. Violated as sub-human they were subjected to forced checks to see if they were really 'pure' brides claiming to be dependants on future Indian migrant husbands. More recently David Blunkett Labour Home Secretary has invoked Margaret Thatcher's 1980s image of being 'Swamped' in the *Mail on Sunday*. Now 'waves of immigrants descend...' on us (*Sunday Telegraph*)<sup>18</sup>. The media tells us of ceaseless tides of economic migrants and bogus asylum seekers who bring with them diseases such as TB and HIV to infect us in our 'pure' nation. This hysteria is not unlike 100 years ago when the Jewish migrants were also seen as infectious 'alien' invaders. It is ironic that Britain, a maritime nation, a small island, unconsciously invokes these embattled headlines of human waves beating down their doors, 'flooding in' and 'swallowing up' what is left of Britishness.

In the 1960s politicians such as Enoch Powell mined this political gold of race hate, just as Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett and Michael Howard leader of the Conservative Party have done today. As Phillip Gourevitch (2000) shows in his disturbing book on the genocide in Rwanda, political ideology combined with a strong State media can effectively be used to exploit the mythologies of tribal and ethnic divisions and create unspeakable acts of human hate. Of course we say to ourselves, "we are not like that, it could never happen here", until the first asylum seekers are hunted down and killed in Glasgow or chased out of town in Dover with baseball bats<sup>19</sup>. Reena Bhavnani, Veena Meeto, and I argue in our new book, *Tackling the Roots of Racism (2005)* that these racist responses to 'the other' in our midst are sanctioned by the Elite, the politicians and the media and the powerful. Racism becomes everyday speak, it becomes normalised. Now 'asylum seeker' is the new swear word in the playground.

## **Story 5. Assimilating Hope 1960-1970**

40 years ago there were many theories as to why black children may not do well at school. In 1960s Britain black children were bussed out to cool out and water down white fears whipped up by the conservative politician Enoch Powell during the racist Smethwick by-election, and the Notting Hill Riots. It was believed the children of migrants needed to assimilate, lose their cultural markers and blend in. It was believed they were not only culturally and socially deficit coming from less civilised societies but also that they were inherently intellectually lacking. The now discredited pseudo-scientific IQ tests of Jensen and Eysenck claimed to show black children were racially different and as such had lower intelligence ( Mirza 1998).

But 'natural ability' is still an issue. In what Gillborn and Youdell call the 'new IQism', (2000) the pressures of educational policy, such as league tables, causes the sifting and sorting of pupils into tiers and streams by perceived ability. The patterns are often racialised with black children locked into the lower streams.

### ***Picture 7 about here***

I was a little girl in the 1960s, but I remember the being given a doll and asked which one I liked. Later refined into the Milner's scientific doll studies in the 1970s, the study suggested that if you chose a white doll rather than a dark one like yourself you were exhibiting negative self-esteem and low self-concept ( Milner 1975). This in turn affected your feelings of alienation and disaffection to be integrated and thus learn. Does this seem improbable now? Work on raising achievement of young black people through raising self-esteem is still with us today, though in its more sophisticated form of positive role models and mentoring. While it has been a life line to many young black and Asian people who have been damaged by the effects of racism, we still need to acknowledge its roots in the cultural deficit model and understand its limitations.

English as a Second Language was also seen as a problem. Not just Pakistani and Bengali but also Patois and Creole. 30 years ago Bernard Coard (1971)<sup>20</sup> brought to light, in his seminal pamphlet, the scandal of disproportionate numbers of Caribbean

children being labelled as Educationally Sub-Normal (ESN). They were being put in special units, what were called then 'Sin Bins'. The Black Parents Movement<sup>21</sup> was an important grassroots political response by the black community to the criminalisation and the wanton discarding of their children.

But this seems long ago, surely it is not happening now? But now we have PRUs (Pupil Referral Units). The issue that drives it now is the discourse on discipline and antisocial behaviour. As Tony Sewell (1997) has shown in his research there is no doubt that black masculine peer pressure to be 'cool', urban youth culture, and inter-racial gangs are issues for schools. This clearly relates to underachievement. However there has been no attempt to decouple these issues of social control from the issues of 'race' and racism. David Gillborn's (1990) research shows we have effectively criminalised generations of black children, particularly the boys by not recognising the subtle consequences of stereotyping, particularly what he calls the 'Myth of the Afro Caribbean Macho' which has seeped into the classroom and the consciousness of teachers. We find now black boys are 3 times more likely to be excluded from school <sup>22</sup>. It's an epidemic, a *real* crisis for the children and the parents.

### **Story 6: The Multicultural Dream? 1980- 1990**

Barry Troyna one of our important educational theorists called this period the 3 'S's' Somas, Saris, and Steelbands (Troyna 1992). It was an apt description of the day to day interpretation of Roy Jenkins's famous call for multiculturalism as, 'not a flattening out process but one of equal opportunity and cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'<sup>23</sup>. Aliya my daughter was at primary school then and we did a lot of sari wearing and bringing of food. Here she is with her class being an African bird.

### **Picture 8 about here**

In the 1980s, twenty years five ago there were the Brixton Uprisings. Aliya was just born and we lived in near Brixton, I remember being caught up in the riots. The hate was consuming, but this explosion of anger and frustration was also a watershed. The Scarman Report (1981) that followed uncovered the racism of criminal justice system. The Rampton (1981) and Swann Reports (1985) on multiracial education showed educational underachievement had taken root, and for the first time linked it

to socio economic concerns of race and class. In this time dedicated scholars saw the visionary potential of multicultural education and engaged in radical, expansive and inclusive scholarship. I have had the privilege of working with many of them, such as Sally Tomlinson (1983) and Peter Figueroa (1991). In a critique of existing theories and the limitations of the 1988 Educational Reform Act they called for a more coherent approach to multicultural education. They showed many complex factors make a difference. Schools make a difference, as does the curriculum, poverty and class inequality, and regressive colour-blind Government policy.

The antiracist teachers movement also identified institutional and structural racism in the school system. Teacher expectations had always been at the core of theories on the self-fulfilling prophecy of how educational underachievement operates in a cycle of low expectations followed by low pupil outcomes. But 20 years on there is still no integral antiracist training for teachers. 70 % of Newly Qualified Teachers say they do not feel equipped to teach pupils from different ethnicities (Multiverse 2004). They may get an hour class on diversity in their whole training, and often I am the invited guest speaker!

In the 1980s the Right Wing backlash against multicultural education was all consuming. From the USA to the UK they ridiculed any attempts at cultural inclusion as 'political correctness' and 'dumbing down'. Now, after the 2001 summer disturbances in the northern towns of Bradford and Oldham, Trevor Phillips the Head of the Commission for Racial Equality too has declared 'multiculturalism is dead'<sup>24</sup>. It is argued it has led to segregation and caused ethnic enclaves particularly in school which have held young people back. But now in the Government's sophisticated language of Social Cohesion and Social Inclusion -which embodies the notion of interfaith and intercultural understanding, citizenship and community engagement- we see again that communities must integrate, lose their cultural markers to become viable (Home Office 2005). Is this a return to assimilationism? Has the wheel turned full circle? Are we back where we were 40 years ago? Is this just a new take on the same old problems? What is our vision for a *real* multicultural Britain?

### **Story 7: The Difference of Diversity : 2000 -2005**

We have entered a new era in 'race talk'. Now we talk of 'diversity and difference' This has fundamentally changed the patterns on the quilt. As Kenan Malik <sup>25</sup>

powerfully argues we no longer focus on old fashioned ideas of equality and the universal qualities that make us, humanity, the same. Now, in the wake of the Identity Politics of the 1980s we celebrate our differences; being a woman, being black, being Muslim, being gay. Discrimination based on gender, sexuality, race, disability and age and religion are now high on the legislative agenda<sup>26</sup>.

This politics of recognition enabled those who had been marginalised to find a voice. It was a liberating time but not without its problems. It has been translated into a bureaucratic approach to diversity which monitors our progress and tracks our differences. We now have glossy brochures with our multi-coloured faces and wonderful policies and institutional statements that promise inclusion and change. But in reality, as a recent LDA report (2004) shows there has been little progress toward equality. Good intentions remain locked in an institutional paper trail, unable to translate to our hearts and minds. Now we hear of diversity as 'good business sense'. We can expand the market more effectively by embracing difference. Diversity, we are told opens up human potential and enables the best to excel. Ironically in the market place difference and diversity has led to the 'declining significance of race'. Now in a colour-blind approach we are told we are all the same. Fair treatment is based on merit. But what if we don't all have the same equal opportunities to get that merit?

In the story of education how does this notion of merit translate? Underpinning the *Aiming High* programme (DfES 2003b) to raise achievement for black and minority ethnic young people we see tables that chart hierarchies of difference between ethnicities (DfES 2005)<sup>27</sup>.

### ***Illustration 1 about here***

Here we use the measure of getting five examination subjects at GCSE to rank ethnic groups in order of ability<sup>28</sup>. It is seen as a good thing, with Indian and Chinese (the so called 'model minorities') at the top and Africans and Caribbeans (the so called 'failing' minorities) at the bottom. But what does this tell us? Some are gifted, others are not? Are Asians docile and hardworking (like coolies of the past)? Do blacks have a chip on their shoulder and rebel (like uppity slaves of the past)? What do you think? What do we think? What do teachers think? We can ask, 'What about class, gender and regional difference in attainment?' We know these make a



difference, but this complexity is rarely highlighted in the 'race' and achievement debate ( Gillborn and Mirza 2000).

Now, as in this graph, ethnicity and cultural difference have become signifiers for 'race'. This is the new racism. We have moved from biological notions of innate differences in the 19th Century to religious, national and cultural notions of innate differences in 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is as if cultural and religious differences are embodied in nature. In the new cultural construction of 'race', cultural and religious difference is played out when we say ... "blacks are good at sport, not so good at school. Chinese are good at maths, and make good food. Asians are good at business and love family life. Muslims cannot be trusted, they are aggressive, sexist and under all those clothes, usually a bit wild eyed." Racism in this cultural and religious guise seems less overt. We understand these differences. Recently a student said to me, 'What do you mean by "We". What I mean is the pervasive way *We* all talk about race, as if cultural and religious differences are fixed and immutable. It is a racialised way of being that infiltrates our daily language, personal interactions, professional practice, and what's more our social and education policies.

There has been some excellent policy research on diversity. Maud Blair at the DfES has shown what makes a difference is strong leadership, clear management and a positive school ethos that facilitates open discussion about difficult issues, such as racism, sexism, and bullying (Blair et al 1998). But when we look at the evidence of raising achievement projects under the Government initiatives of EIC (Excellence in Cities) and EMAG (Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant), what we find is not a focus on the 'hard' structural issues identified by Maud Blair and her team. We find instead a 'soft' approach focusing on culture, behaviour and the home. There are schemes for motivational and personal development, schemes for counselling and pastoral support, mentoring and role models. There are projects on parenting skills, translation services and summer schools; home work and breakfast clubs, writers workshops, and exam techniques.

It could be argued that these schemes are making a difference, and I am sure special provision, such as Trevor Phillips has recently advocated for black boys can and does make a difference if well conceived and delivered <sup>29</sup>. The most recent figures show Bangladeshi, African, Caribbean and Pakistani pupils' GCSEs results are up by nearly 3 points<sup>30</sup>. But the approach to raising achievement is still located in the old multicultural palliatives of the 3 'Ss', with concepts of negative self-esteem and

cultural deficit. The new cultural racism has slipped in by the backdoor. In this story it does seem that 'the more things change the more they stay the same' .

### **Conclusion : Where is the Love? Towards a Sociology of Gendered Aspirations**

Where do these seven stories take us? There are always two sides to every story and the story of race, gender and education is no different. On one side is the harsh story of failure and being failed by the educational system. It is the story of racism and hate. But on the other hand educational desire remains hopeful and enduring. It is the story of love.

In my research women weave together stories of love, transcendence and hope. Hope, as Paulo Freire the Brazilian educational visionary says, is at the centre of the matrix between hope, indignation, anger, and love- this matrix is the dialectic of change (Freire 2004:xxx). Like him I too argue for an understanding of the energy and commitment and love of education through teaching and learning as the mechanism for social change.

Plato argued education is fundamentally about love. Raimond Gaita the philosopher draws on this and tells us nothing goes deep in education unless it is under the inspiration and discipline of a certain kind of love. A teacher's privileged obligation is to initiate their students into a 'real and worthy love' for their subject, "there is nothing finer that one human being can do for another" (Gaita 2000: 231). The struggle for humanity, as the Black and Asian community know is fundamentally linked to the struggle for education. For a black person to become educated is to become human<sup>31</sup>. Franz Fanon the black philosopher writes in his seminal text *Black Skin White Masks*;

*"Nothing is more astonishing than to hear a black (woman or) man express him (or herself) properly, for then they are putting on the white world."*  
(1986:36)

Education in this sense is not about the process of learning or teaching it is about refutation.

From this evidence how do we build a sociology of gendered aspirations? We have to look for patterns in the quilt, patterns which go against the grain of formal social expectations. We have to 'see round corners' and look at things differently, chart the hidden histories. If we look at the what appears to be on the surface the conservative act of self improvement through women's individual expressions of educational desire for themselves and their children through time and space, we can see patterns of what I have called a new social movement (Mirza and Reay 2000a). Women educators like my Grandmother, the supplementary school teachers, and the young black women in schools and universities should be seen as more than fragmented players. They seek social transformation through educational change. They struggle for educational inclusion in order to transform their opportunities and in so doing subvert racist expectations and beliefs.

If we look at the story of the racialisation of education, where young black men are 3 times more likely to be excluded and failed at school; where theories and approaches to black and Asian educational underachievement have been based on low intelligence, cultural confusion, negative self esteem, alienation and bad behaviour, then the struggle for education becomes a battlefield. And if it is a battlefield, then the women are post-modern warriors. They are, as *The Guardian* said recently a 'Quiet Riot'<sup>32</sup> strategically using their social and cultural knowledge drawn from their experience to educate themselves and their children. These women occupy a 'third space', a space of radical opposition in which they struggle for new forms of citizenship, what I call 'real citizenship' that deserves to be recognised (Mirza and Reay 2000b).

But is all this talk of love and new social movements naive, a Black Feminist Utopia? In the ideological and actual war against racism nothing stays the same, nothing is what it seems. You have to be contingent, strategic, strong and vigilant. When I was appointed to the Labour Government's Task Force on Standards in Education in 1997, David Blunkett the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment was interested in capturing the energy and commitment of the black community to drive forward the schools standards agenda. Since then I have seen supplementary schools prevalent in 1970s and 1980s decline as the Government swallows them up and uses them to build its out of school programmes. This is the new outsourcing. Just as the Socialist Sunday Schools set up by the working class communities at the turn of 20th Century were absorbed by the expansion following the 1944 Education Act, so too are these supplementary schools being absorbed by educational reforms

to 'raise standards' since 1997. What goes around comes around. For the Government education is always a major election issue, but as Paulo Freire cautions, a dark cloud is enveloping education. When education is reduced to mere training, as is happening now with neo-liberal education markets, it annihilates dreams (Freire 2004:102).

This paper has been a story of the power of love to transcend the struggle for education. We need to hold on to our love, hopes, and dreams, the fabric that makes the heart of the quilt.

Picture 1



Woman weaver in Southern India at her loom September 2004

Picture 2



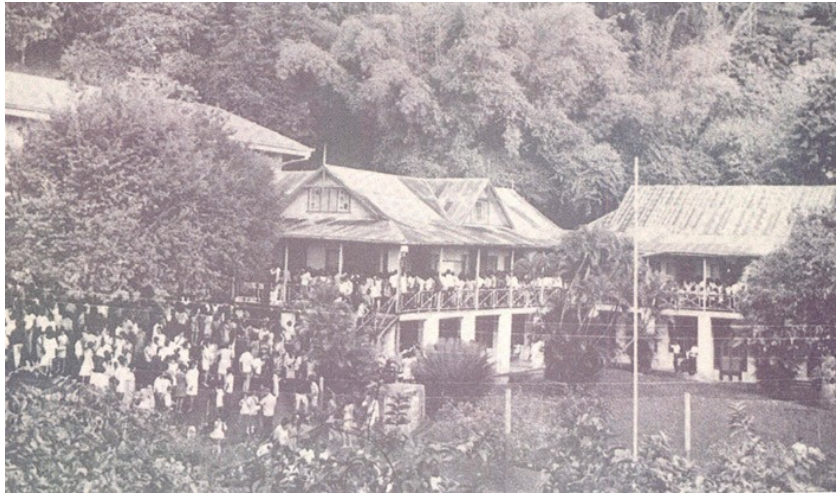
Indian bridal tapestry quilt - Tamil Nadu

Picture 3



My Grandmother Theresa Hosein circa 1940

Picture 4



Naparima Girls High School, Trinidad (circa 1960)

Picture 5



Black Saturday School circa 1970 ( Runnymede Collection: TES 6.1.1984 )

Picture 6



My Parents, Ralph and Hilda Hosier;  
wedding picture London 1956

Picture 7



Me and my brother, Gerard Hosier St Mary's primary school  
Balham, London 1962

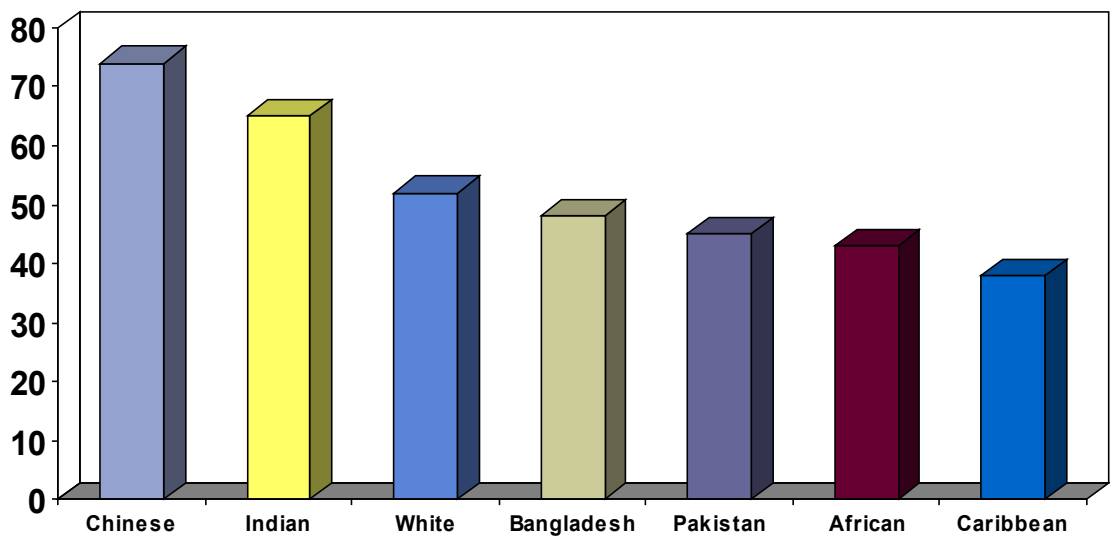
Picture 8



My daughter Aliya Mirza (centre front) in her South London primary school 1985

Illustration 1

### Percentage of Ethnic Minority Pupils with 5Grade A\*-C GCSEs



Source: DfES (2005) National Statistics First Release SFR 08/2005 24 Feb  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/rsaweb/DR/SFR](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsaweb/DR/SFR)





<sup>1</sup> This paper based on the transcript of my Inaugural Professorial Lecture ‘Race, Gender and Educational Desire’ delivered at Middlesex University, 17 May 2005. It can be accessed in full at [www.mdx.ac.uk/hssc/research/cres.htm](http://www.mdx.ac.uk/hssc/research/cres.htm)

<sup>2</sup> For accounts of Ella Baker see Branch (1988) and Eyerman & Jamison (1991).

<sup>3</sup> For information on the work of women like Lilian Cingo and Lynette Coetzee who manage the ‘Phelophepa Health Care Train’ also called the ‘Train of Hope’ or ‘Miracle Train’ see Into Africa, *The Guardian*, March 18, 2003; see also the film ‘Act of Faith’ <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/lsact.html>; or visit web site [http://www.mhc.org.za/news/transnet\\_foundation.htm](http://www.mhc.org.za/news/transnet_foundation.htm)

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the philosophy of ‘back to basics’ in British social policy see Jordan (1995).

<sup>5</sup> In 1948 the ship Empire Windrush brought the first Caribbean migrants to work and live in Britain. Their arrival represented a significant multicultural challenge for British society especially in terms of highlighting the inherent racism that characterised British national identity. See Phillips & Phillips (1999).

<sup>6</sup> Thirty years ago this was a pioneering interdisciplinary degree specialising in what was then called ‘third world development’ focusing on agriculture, economics, cultural and social issues. It is still a thriving course today.

<sup>7</sup> *The Sunday Times Magazine* (2004) Dynamite Misses, Lesley White, October 10<sup>th</sup>; The term ‘Dynamite Misses’ refers to young black women who are strong, independent and career minded, like the Black British female rap singer, Miss Dynamite.

<sup>8</sup> Theories of black female success in education have emphasized either matriarchal social structures (see Fuller 1982), or sub-cultural resistance (see Mac an Ghail 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Though ethnic minorities show higher rates of HE participation, these statistics mask enormous variations between minority groups and the disadvantages they face getting into different types of universities and subjects. There are also significant differences in how they progress in their degree and on from there into the labour market. For a detailed analysis see Connor et al (2004); *The Guardian* (2004) Mixed Messages, Tariq Modood and Helen Connor, July 13.

<sup>10</sup> As a proportion of the average 18-19 year old population we find 59 percent of young black women going to university to do a fulltime undergraduate degree, as are 48 percent of young black men. This compares to 31 percent of young white women and 28 percent of young white men aged 18-19 (NAO 2002:6).

<sup>11</sup> For references on the policy of Widening Participation in higher education see Callender (2003); DfES (2003a); NAO (2002); Connor (2001); Thomas (2001).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Lawrence was a seventeen year old African Caribbean young man, stabbed at a bus stop by a gang of racist youths in 1993. Due to police racism his killers were never convicted, but the mass public mobilisation led by his parents and subsequent police inquiry and anti-racist legislation marks a watershed in race relations in Britain. (see Macpherson (1999).

<sup>13</sup> *The Guardian* (2005) The boundaries of race in Britain today, Gary Younge, April 25<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Roy Jenkins, Labour Home Secretary, speech to the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1966 (quoted in Runnymede Trust 2000).

<sup>15</sup> From November 2005 prospective British citizens have to take and pass a compulsory test in English language proficiency and British civic knowledge before being granted a passport and the right to vote. These tests are controversial as they are seen as a way of excluding certain people from British citizenship. See *The Guardian* 2003 Immigrant citizenship classes planned, Sarah Left September 3, 2003 (and related articles); See also [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/4391710.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4391710.stm)

<sup>16</sup> In the late 1980s Norman Tebbit, a senior conservative politician publicly suggested that an appropriate test of Britishness was to ask young British Asians which cricket team they supported. If they supported visiting Pakistani or Indian teams their allegiance to Britain was questionable. This measure of multicultural identity has come to be known as the 'cricket test' (see Brah 1996:195).

<sup>17</sup> *The Guardian* (2004) The golden thread that runs through our history, Gordon Brown 8<sup>th</sup> July.

<sup>18</sup> These newspaper cuttings are from the Runnymede Collection, an archive charting 40 years of the struggle for a multicultural Britain. See [www.mdx.ac.uk/www/runnymedecollection](http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/runnymedecollection)) *Financial Times* (21.10.70) Drowned by coloured immigrants; *Evening News* (21.3.78) Stem the tide of migrants; *Guardian* (1.2.79) Virginity tests on immigrants at Heathrow; *Mail on Sunday* (12.5.02) Swamped; *Sunday Telegraph* (25.7.02) Wave of migrants descends.

<sup>19</sup> For accounts of racist attacks see <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/may2001/glas-m25.shtml>; <http://www.ncrm.org.uk/deaths/>; <http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/paper/index.php?article=423>

<sup>20</sup> This pamphlet has been re-appraised 35 years on in a new collection of essays, see Richardson (2005).

<sup>21</sup> For archives documenting the civil rights struggle for a multiracial Britain see Runnymede Collection at Middlesex University ([www.mdx.ac.uk/www/runnymedecollection](http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/runnymedecollection)) and The George Padmore Institute Archives (<http://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/archive.asp>)

<sup>22</sup> For statistics and analysis of the high rate of black and minority ethnic pupils excluded from school in the UK, see DfES (2004) and Wright et al (2005).

<sup>23</sup> Roy Jenkins speech to the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1966 (quoted in Runnymede Trust 2000).

<sup>24</sup> *The Guardian* (2004) Multiculturalism is dead, Anthony Andrews, April 8<sup>th</sup>; More recently Trevor Phillips has also claimed, 'Britain is sleepwalking into segregation', (September 22, 2005, Manchester Town Hall) for full text of the speech see <http://www.cre.gov.uk/> A critique of this can be found at [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/CI/CP/Our\\_Society\\_Today/News\\_Articles\\_2005/segregation.aspx](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/CI/CP/Our_Society_Today/News_Articles_2005/segregation.aspx)

<sup>25</sup> *The Guardian* (2003) The dirty D-word, Kenan Malik, October 29<sup>th</sup>

<sup>26</sup> By 2009 the existing anti-discrimination bodies for gender, 'race' and disability will come under one overarching single Commission for Equality and Human Rights which will also support new rights on religion and belief, age, sexual orientation and human rights, see DTi (2004); Home

Office (2005)

<sup>27</sup> See DfES (2005) for a statistical break down of pupil assessment across the National Curriculum. It is very detailed by subject, gender, age and social class etc, but the general breakdown of the main groups of ethnic minority pupils gaining 5 or more grade A\*-C at GCSE or equivalent is : Chinese 74.2%; Indian 66.6% ; White 52.3%; Bangladeshi 48.4%; Pakistani 45.2%; African 43.3%; African Caribbean 35.7% (visually represented here in illustration 1) ,

<sup>28</sup> The General Certificate of Education (GCSE) is a national academic qualification taken at the end of compulsory schooling when the pupils are aged 15-16. Grades are awarded from A\* -G with A\* being the highest . As pass grades are from A\* -C gaining 5 or more passes at A\*- C is used as a benchmark for evaluating educational attainment .

<sup>29</sup> Trevor Phillips is the Head of the Commission for Racial Equality, for his statement see ‘Black boys separate classes idea’, Monday, March 7<sup>th</sup> 2005.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4323979.stm>

<sup>30</sup> See ‘Minority ethnic pupils make further progress at GCSE’, 24 Feb, 2005.  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/display](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/display): See also ‘Two ethnic groups narrow exams gap’, *The Guardian* Mathew Taylor, Feb 2, 2005 [www.guardian.co.uk/](http://www.guardian.co.uk/)

<sup>31</sup> For texts on ‘race’, education and what it is to be ‘human’, see Fordham (1996) and Casey (1993).

<sup>32</sup> *The Guardian* ( 2001) The quiet riot, Helen Carter, July 12<sup>th</sup>.

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<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/exclusions/uploads/RR616.pdf>.
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