100 racialisation, relationality and riots: intersections and interpellations

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abstract

This paper takes up Avtar Brah's (1999) invitation to write back to the issues she raises in her mapping of the production of gendered, classed and racialised subjectivities in west London. It addresses two topics that, together, illuminate racialised and gendered interpellation and psychosocial processes. The paper is divided into two main sections. The first draws on empirical research on the transition to motherhood conducted in east London to consider one mother's experience of giving birth in the local maternity hospital. The maternity ward constituted a site where racialised difference became salient, leading her to construct her maternal identity by asserting her difference from Bangladeshi mothers and so self-racialising, as well as 'othering' Bangladeshi mothers. The paper analyses the ways in which her biography may help to explain why her experience of the maternity hospital interpellates her into racialised positioning. The second section focuses on media responses to the riots in various English cities in August 2011. It examines the ways in which some media punditry racialised the riots and inclusion in the British postcolonial nation. The paper analyses three sets of commentaries and illuminates the ways in which they racialise the debate in essentialising ways, reproducing themes that were identified in the 1980s as 'new racism' and apportioning blame for the riots to 'black gangster culture'. While these media pronouncements focus on racialisation, they are intersectional in implicitly also invoking gender and social class. The paper argues that the understanding of the mother's self-racialisation is deepened by a consideration of the racialised discourses that can be evoked (and are contested) in periods of social unrest. The paper thus draws on part of the methodology of 'The Scent of Memory' in layering media readings and biographical narratives to analyse the contemporary psychosocial space of racialisation.

keywords

intersections; interpellation; psychosocial; racialisation; racism; riots

introduction

In 'The Scent of Memory', Avtar Brah (1999) takes as her starting point the poignant example of a white, working-class woman, Jean Lott, who committed suicide in the 1990s, leaving a note that identified her hatred of living in Southall. The painful curtailment of Jean's life led her son to analyse her emotional engagement with the shift in the area from one populated by the 'respectable' white working classes in the 1960s to one characterised as 'Asian' in the 1980s. For Brah, the substance of the suicide note was interpellative. It implicated her in Jean's story by hailing her into her own and Southall's racialised, gendered history. Brah's meditation on the questions thus raised for her involved the pursuit and analysis of the 'scent of memory' in different contexts and using different methodologies. The resulting account is theoretically rich, multi-layered, intertextual and psychosocial and links Brah's empirical work with everyday experiences, cultural readings and reflexive engagement with the complexity of her own and others' intersectional positioning. Published at the end of the twentieth century, 'The Scent of Memory' raises numerous issues of relevance to the second decade of the twenty-first century.

In this paper, we take up Brah's invitation to write back to the issues she raises by addressing two topics of contemporary concern that elucidate racialised, gendered interpellation and the importance of looking at both macro (social) and micro (personal) processes. The paper is structured into two main parts, each of which is concerned with contemporary events related to racialisation and its intersection with other social categories. Together, the two parts illuminate the ways in which personal and social histories are imbricated in the present. The paper starts by presenting a fragment of an empirical interview, which gives some insight into the complexity of processes of self-racialisation and othering. It then considers some media commentaries on the English riots of August 2011 to examine processes of racialisation that make general, rather than personal, claims. Each of these issues is central to Brah's analysis of how racialisation disrupted Jean's satisfaction with the area in which she spent much of her adult life. In adopting this structure, we aim to address some of the ways in which the personal and sociostructural are always interlinked in processes of racialisation. We thus aim to complement Brah's (1999) analyses by focusing on the psychosocial and 'writing back' to her concerns.

The first main section of the paper draws on empirical research on the transition to motherhood conducted in Tower Hamlets, an area of London that has become increasingly identified as 'Bangladeshi' over the last two decades and can in some ways be viewed as paralleling the history of Southall's identification as 'Indian'. It considers how one mother racialises herself and others in discussing her experience of the local maternity hospital and, in doing so, interpellates us as authors into racialised positioning. At the same time, the detailed

psychosocial attention to the racist discourses she constructs allows openness to the functions served by her biographical narrative. The second section examines media responses to the riots in many English cities in August 2011. It focuses on the ways in which some of this media punditry racialised the riots and inclusion in the British postcolonial nation and the reactions this provoked. The paper argues that the understanding of the mother's self-racialisation is deepened by a consideration of the racialised discourses that can be evoked (and that are also contested) in periods of social unrest. The paper thus draws on part of the methodology of 'The Scent of Memory' in layering media readings and biographical narratives to produce a palimpsest analysis of the contemporary psychosocial space of racialisation.

self-racialising the transition to motherhood

The empirical part of this paper is informed by a study, conducted by Heather Elliott, Wendy Hollway and Ann Phoenix, of first-time mothers from a variety of ethnic groups living in Tower Hamlets.[1] The study is referred to as the 'Becoming a Mother' study and was part of the ESRC *Identities and Social Action* research programme. Tower Hamlets is ethnically mixed and one of the most disadvantaged boroughs in the United Kingdom, but with a mixed social class population since it borders London's financial heartland, the City. It has a long tradition of settlement by successive waves of immigrants and a population that is approximately 33 per cent Bangladeshi, 42 per cent White and 7 per cent African-Caribbean.[2] Eighteen mothers were interviewed on three occasions in 2005 and 2006: in late pregnancy or soon after giving birth, when their infants were 6 months old and approximately a year after giving birth. They were British African-Caribbean (2); British Bangladeshi (8); West African (1); White British (6); and White South African (1). In addition, two focus groups, one of white mothers and the other of Bangladeshi British mothers, were conducted after the interviews were completed. The study explored the identity processes involved in the transition to motherhood. It focused on women's experiences of becoming first-time mothers and the emotional resources and conflicts they bring to the task. It also considered how the mothers negotiate their new identities in intersection with ethnicity, religion, culture, age and social class. The interview questions were designed to elicit 'experience-near' accounts of specific life events.

It is no surprise that the transition to parenthood marks a shift in people's lives and responsibilities that often crystallises for parents how and where they want to live in order to bring up their children in the circumstances they consider optimal, including the areas and schools they would ideally choose. This was the case in the 'Becoming a Mother' study. The mothers were differentiated in their feelings about Tower Hamlets after birth. Some consolidated their

1 ESRC-funded study number RES 148-25 0058: Becoming a Mother.

2 Office of National Statistics. (2001) Census 2001 — ethnicity and religion in England and Wales, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/commentaries/ethnicity.asp, last accessed 26 May 2008.

commitment to the area as ideal for childrearing, some moved soon after birth, some moved later and others wanted to move as soon as they could. Nine of the eighteen women moved (two out of London) within the first year of motherhood, while a further two had advanced plans to move and some moved later. Those who moved out of the borough generally viewed Tower Hamlets as fun to live in while they were childless, but less appropriate for children to live in, perhaps partly because of the scarcity of suitable housing. For some of the white mothers and the one West African mother in the study, the Bangladeshi population was not viewed positively, something that the focus group and some individual interviews with Bangladeshi mothers made clear. Many of the sample appeared to feel guarded about speaking of racialised difference. This was perhaps not surprising given that they gave birth soon after the vehement competition between the Labour and Respect parties in the 2005 UK election campaign that became racialised in Tower Hamlets, and the bombings and attempted bombings of 7 July 2005 ('7/7'), two of which took place in Tower Hamlets.

This section focuses on the account of a white mother, given the pseudonym Catherine, who was interviewed by Heather Elliott. For Catherine, the experience of giving birth in the local hospital produced feelings about Tower Hamlets akin to Jean Lott's about Southall. In the extract below, round brackets signify a pause, with the number in brackets indicating the number of seconds the pause lasted and (.) indicating that it was a pause of less than one second. Underlining under a word indicates that it was emphasised, while information in square brackets is information to the reader about either the dynamics of the talk or the transcription.

> *Catherine*: ... the other thing that's strange about that hospital [slower] is that (.) it's a Bangladeshi community, so *most* of the women in there (3) are Bangladeshi. And there was one woman who didn't feed her daughter properly, because it was a baby girl. [text omitted] And they prefer boys, because you have to provide a dowry don't you? [text omitted] I think, it's not racist at all, but because they're Bang- because it's Bangladeshi um (3) their society is different to ours. It's a bit like that in Poplar as well, there is this kind of it does seem like segregation, that's where you *get* a lot of the Respect party coming round and everything else, *because* of all of that. [text omitted] Um and it just seems like there's no one there that *you* can relate to, or that could relate to you, because (.) most of the Bangladeshi women there *stay at home* and always <u>have</u> been stay at home women, either mothers or first time mums, but they have always been staying at home. [text omitted] So going in there, being someone who has had a career, and <u>now</u> decided to have (.) a family, there's no one who relates to that.

Following our intertextual engagement with 'The Scent of Memory', an understanding of why Catherine experiences racialised disidentification with Bangladeshi mothers and Tower Hamlets requires both an exploration of Catherine's biography and of the socio-economic context. This section thus locates the account above in the context of what we know about Catherine's life.

biographical 'triggers'

While Catherine is of a much younger generation than Jean and has come to adulthood at a time when Britain is undoubtedly multiethnic, her account gives a similar sense of alienation and loneliness to what Jean seems to have felt. For Catherine, who generally spends her days at work as a sales executive, the maternity ward constituted a microcosm of Tower Hamlets and a site of spatialisation where she experienced racialised difference. In that space, she constructed her identity by asserting her difference from Bangladeshi mothers and generalising from one unfavourable example (of a Bangladeshi mother not feeding her daughter properly). In doing so, she also racialised social class since the lack of a career she criticises, and the suggestion that Bangladeshi women do not wait to decide to have children, is at least partly related to social class and education. Catherine can be said to be self-racialising as well as othering Bangladeshi mothers by positioning herself as clearly very different from them.

The experience of giving birth in the hospital illustrates the ways in which space allows the existence of multiplicity where heterogeneity can coexist in 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005), even as the space is racialised (Westwood, 1990; Räthzel *et al*., 2008). Space here is not only about practices and relationality, but about trajectories that are always in process and under construction (Massey, 2005), since desires for moving or staying put are relational and dynamic. In this case, Catherine constructed the hospital as a space for Bangladeshis, with the implication that it is not a comfortable site for white mothers like her. In Brah's terms, 'the discourse of racial superiority may be understood here as *displacing* class antagonism' (1999: 11). While Catherine's discourse sets up power relations marked by constructions of superiority over Bangladeshi mothers, there is also a sense that she is excluded because she does not belong.

The structure of this short extract from the interview is familiar to discourse analysts. It constructs a proleptic double hander (Billig, 1991) that defends against possible charges of racism: 'I think, it's not racist at all, but because they're Bang- because it's Bangladeshi um (3) their society is different to ours'. Catherine lays out a case for there being important differences between Bangladeshi people and other people who live in Tower Hamlets. What she says fits with Brah's (1999) analysis of how localities can become 'racially' coded in ways that produce challenges to spatial identities and feelings of belonging. In Catherine's case, this racial coding also serves to 'other' Bangladeshis. That couplet of belonging or exclusion as part of racial coding together with processes of othering makes space itself interpellative.

In analysing the reasons for Jean's dislike of Southall, Brah draws on Althusser's notion of interpellation to produce a psychosocial analysis. According to

Althusser (1977), people are 'interpellated' as subjects when they recognise themselves to have been 'hailed' by ideology. Metaphorically, this process is akin to what happens when someone recognises that they are being hailed by a policeman. In everyday life, institutions such as families, churches and schools 'hail' people by including them in categories that prescribe and enforce particular ways of thinking about themselves and of acting as subjects. Brah meditates on her interpellation as Asian by her Southall research participants in the 1970s and by Jean's avowed hatred of Southall before interrogating the emotion associated with those accounts in the context of Jean's and her participants' lives and gendered, racialised and social class positioning. Brah (1999: 7) gives a particularly powerful example of how interpellation can involve racialised/gendered processes of othering and intense emotions (which in this case are painful):

> One 'white' mother whom I interviewed in 1976 had said to me: 'Where did *they* come from?', my father used to say, 'they were here, and then the shops opened up.'
> The 'they' in this locution signified 'Asians'. 'She means people like me', I had thought to myself, feeling acutely 'othered' .... I could not be a disinterested listener, although I listened attentively. My intellect, feelings, and emotions had all been galvanized by my respondent's discourse. I was framed within it, whether I liked it or not. What was it that made her referent 'they' instantly recognizable as 'Asians' to us both? (Brah, 1999: 7)

Just as Brah (1999: 5) explains that 'The word "Southall" – ringing loud and clear in my ears – connected me across diverse, even disparate, life worlds to "Jean" – this 57-year-old white woman who took her own life in March 1988', so mention of the place name 'Tower Hamlets' was highly evocative and emotionally coded for Catherine and (in different ways) for the women in the 'Becoming a Mother' study.

Catherine was interviewed by a white woman resident of Tower Hamlets and appeared to identify with her as an employed woman. As black readers of this account who do not live in Tower Hamlets and are of different generations from Catherine, we feel interpellated into subject positions as 'other', even though it is Asian culture, not colour that is at issue in Catherine's account. In the UK context, we are framed within Catherine's discourse because of the numerous ways in which 'black' or 'African Caribbean culture' is constructed as pathological (as, for example, in the section below). We are also 'hailed' by the routine linking of 'black and Asian' or 'black and minority ethnic', particularly when difference from the white majority ethnic group is being evaluated negatively. This is not to claim that the process of interpellation Brah describes is either the same, or feels the same, as those we experience on reading this part of Catherine's interview. Nor is there any necessary fellow feeling between different racialised and ethnicised groups. However, racialised interpellations are not neatly confined within socially constructed boundaries. Brah provides a helpful example of how

experience can give flashes of insight into other people's experiences in describing her early experiences of living in the United Kingdom:

> Within weeks of being in London I had been called a 'Paki'. I was so taken aback ... that I was struck silent. I now realised ... what it felt like to be called a 'nigger' ... I was now constituted within the discourse of 'Paki' as a racialised insider/outsider, a post-colonial subject constructed and marked by everyday practices at the heart of the metropolis ... it signified the inferiorised Other right here at the core of the fountain head of 'Britishness' (Brah, 1996: 9).

One way in which the concept of interpellation can be extended from Brah's analysis concerns Catherine's *dis*-interpellation by Bangladeshiness, Tower Hamlets as a community and the local maternity ward. The strength of her feelings of strangeness and lack of belonging led her to construct rigid racialised boundaries between Bangladeshis and white mothers (while leaving gender and social class unnamed). This implicitly interpellated her into white English subjectivity. The relational nature of interpellation is thus illuminated by her reaction.

A consideration of interpellation necessarily raises the question of affect (both Catherine's and that of readers positioned in different ways) and its inextricable linking to the socio-economic structures within which we all construct our identities. Interpellation is therefore psychosocial in that it involves the mutual constitution of the personal and the social in ways that constantly transform each other and can be conflictual (Bjerrum Nilsen and Haavind, 2010). 'The Scent of Memory' was ground-breaking in considering the processes through which this happens. Brah's (1999) rich analysis considers history, geography, South Asian concepts that subtly nuance the concepts of 'our own' and 'stranger' and the intersecting relationships produced in London's 'diaspora space' that serve to overdetermine racialised/gendered/social class explanations for Jean Lott's misery and Brah's findings from her Southall study.

The section below addresses some broader sociostructural issues in giving examples of current ways in which racialising discourses (re)produce racisms and make available and justify discourses such as Catherine's. The rest of this section briefly focuses on an area that Brah could not address in 'The Scent of Memory'; the contribution of biographical experience to, in this case Catherine's, spatialised racialisation. Brah (1999) asks early in her paper 'Who was Jean?' and, late in the paper, concludes that Jean necessarily remains an enigma (and perhaps morally ought to). A major aim of the 'Becoming a Mother' study, however, was to find out about the women's identity transitions in the process of becoming mothers from their own perspectives. This more 'personal' understanding can, hopefully, throw light on Catherine's sociostructural identity positioning within the borough in which she lives. In relation to this, two issues appear to be of particular importance.

First, while social class is evident, but implicit, in Catherine's account it was somewhat ambiguous in that she was recruited into the study by a midwife, who told us that Catherine, who lived in a council flat, was working class. However, it did not fit with either her and her partner's employment status or her father's profession and affluence. She was actually not a council tenant, but was subletting a large council flat for a substantial market rent, probably because private rental accommodation is very expensive in Tower Hamlets and few houses are available for sale or rent. Nonetheless, the midwife's misrecognition of Catherine's class position underlines an ambiguity that Catherine appeared to feel. In an interview that took place in late pregnancy, it became clear that there were conflicts for Catherine about her socio-economic positioning and, in particular, that she experienced some people in her family as judging her for not being married and owning a home before having a baby. She experienced her lack of home ownership as a conflictual issue, but could not afford to move during the first year of her daughter's life when she was on maternity leave. However, at the interview when her daughter was 12 months old, she said that her partner had just heard about a local home ownership scheme in Tower Hamlets that would cost less than their current rent and would enable them to part-own a three-bedroom house. She said 'I'll be *happier* when we have the stability of owning our own place' and that she would not have a second child 'until we own our own house and we're moved out of here'.

Second, Catherine had experienced various troubling life events that she felt left her with 'emotional baggage' that she wanted to 'get rid of' because it could affect her daughter. She had a painful and traumatic birth and a difficult postpartum period in the hospital, as well as fears about having to stay at home on maternity leave when she was used to going out to work. Staying at home could, therefore, be seen as part of what she was seeking to 'other' as much as the Bangladeshi women in whom she vested always staying at home and not having careers. Catherine worked in a highly competitive, male-dominated institution and knew that her professional position would be threatened by time away on maternity leave (which proved to be the case). Giving birth in the local hospital was likely, therefore, to have intensified Catherine's fears about motherhood conflicting with her professional identity, and so her middle class status and social networks. This was particularly the case since she would be spending the next few months at home, in a geographical space she usually only passed through to get to work and which she characterised as Bangladeshi.

A plausible explanation for Catherine's reported experience of outsiderness at the hospital is, therefore, that she displaced the source of feelings of outsiderness and her acute sense of undesirable social class positioning in her family onto Bangladeshi women in the hospital and Bangladeshi people more generally in Tower Hamlets. She projected a condensation of negatively evaluated differences from herself onto the Bangladeshi 'community'. Her claims to difference were

thus crucial and salient in allowing Catherine the possibility of feeling more powerful than, and superior to, Bangladeshi women in terms of social class, gendered appropriateness and belonging to the nation. These personal motivations coupled with the ethnicised local history of contestation over resources in Tower Hamlets are likely to have overdetermined Catherine's brief portrayal of Bangladeshis. Her socio-economic positioning and life history are thus both relevant to a consideration of Catherine's self-racialisation and othering of Bangladeshi mothers in the Tower Hamlet's maternity ward.

While the three interviews with Catherine provide more insight into her viewpoints and narratives than were available to Brah (1999) about Jean's, this analysis is necessarily speculative. The implication of such a reading, however, is that, while Catherine's proleptic defence that 'it's not racist at all' is unconvincing, this part of her narrative neither fixes her as racist nor into racist discourses once and for all. Instead, it gives an indication of why a focus on racist discourses, rather than people as racist (e.g. Wetherell and Potter, 1992), allows nuanced, psychosocial readings that reflect the complexities of everyday life. A psychosocial analysis also helps to explain why such a narrative is easily evoked in her particular circumstances and the work it does in Catherine's life. In addition, it produces a holistic and sympathetic reading of Catherine akin to Brah's meditation on Jean because it is rounded and contextual. In so doing, it indicates how racialisation is pervasive and contemporary encounters are deeply psychosocial, interpellating researchers into the stories they hear and the analyses they produce in restorying these accounts (Lewis, 2009; McLeod and Thomson, 2009). These analyses are invaluable in enabling new insights by allowing a space between researchers' own stories and those of their research participants (Elliott, 2011), as well as productive engagement with the emotions evoked (Elliott *et al.*, in press).

The analysis of the above fragment of Catherine's story demonstrates the inextricable linking of personal biography with the socio-economic and political (Mulinari and Räthzel, 2007). The rest of this paper uses contemporary examples to move from the microanalytic focus above to take a broad lens to issues of racism and racialisation similar to those with which Brah was concerned.

writing back: the lingering odour of pathologising discourses

The absence of insider narratives led Brah (1999) to extrapolate from media analyses and analyses of the negative discourses on Asians produced by white research participants in a study she conducted in 1970s Southall. 'The Scent of Memory' includes analyses of political demonstrations against the racist murders of young Asian men in Southall and east London and the riots in Notting Hill in

the 1970s. This allowed Brah both to illuminate the ways in which racist discourses about Asians functioned and were deployed by white residents of Southall and to contextualise them in wider social discourses. Brah (1999: 17) highlights how young black people came together in Notting Hill to stake their claim to an area in which 'dire poverty' jostled with 'fantastic wealth'. She argues that British-born black and Asian young people were asserting a new British political identity and interrogating and challenging constructions of 'whiteness' and the notion that British means white, which was popularised by the Conservative politician Enoch Powell in 1968.

The second half of this paper aims to continue the process of 'writing back' to Brah by considering some of the racialised discourses that circulate at times of social tension. It does so by extrapolating, as Brah does, from analyses of riots that are contemporaneous with the personal experiences at the heart of Catherine's analysis. While the riots happened after Catherine had been interviewed, they illuminate the ways in which negative racialised discourses can become widely available and are both legitimated and contested (in much the same way that negative discourses about Muslims and Asians were commonplace following '7/7' at the time when Catherine was racialising Tower Hamlets). This section examines some of the media discourses that followed the 2011 riots, 35 years later than the riots Brah analyses. It argues that while the causes, social context and nature of the twenty-first century riots are different from those in the 1970s, some of the views expressed by media commentators following the riots parallel the narrow constructions of Britishness that Brah argued British-born black and Asian young people were challenging decades earlier. Our concern here is not to analyse the causes of the riots, which have been the focus of much of the political debate and was partially Brah's focus. Instead, we aim to deconstruct a selection of media commentaries on the riots in terms of their racialised inclusions and exclusions from the nation in order to illuminate parallels with, and divergences from, the context Brah describes and some of the discourses available to Catherine. Whereas Brah focused on macro-historical cultural readings of the riots, we take a somewhat narrower view in analysing individual accounts available in the media.

discursively racialising the riots: ahistorical origin stories

In summer 2011, following the fatal police shooting of a young black man, Mark Duggan, in the north London area of Tottenham, multiethnic riots erupted in several parts of England and lasted for several days. The media and general population were preoccupied by the scale, and sometimes violence, of the riots, which were characterised by looting and setting fire to shops and cars, as well as the multiple causes identified by commentators. While the riots were multiethnic,

a number of commentators held black people responsible. For example, the historian David Starkey used his appearance on BBC 2's news and current affairs programme, *Newsnight*, to make pejorative, essentialising assertions about blackness and to blame black people and what he constructs as a deviant black culture, which he argues some working class white people have adopted.[3] Starkey suggested that the 2011 riots fulfilled Enoch Powell's prophecy, made in his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech, that violent conflict would be the inevitable result of immigration:

> His prophecy was absolutely right in one sense. The Tiber didn't foam with blood, but flames lambent wrapped round Tottenham and wrapped round Clapham, but it wasn't inter-communal violence, this is where he was completely wrong. What's happened is that a substantial section of the chavs have become black. The whites have become black.[4]

3 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14513517 for BBC clip of the programme. Last accessed 18th November 2011.

4 *ibid*.

Starkey's statement gives recognition to the multiethnic nature of the riots and to the unacceptability of old ways of racialising social dissent while determinedly racialising them. As Jones (2011), who opposed Starkey's arguments on the *Newsnight* programme, explains, hatred of the working classes has become so accepted among the middle classes that the pejorative term 'chavs' has become a taken-for-granted negative stereotype. For Starkey, whose professional historical interest lies in the upper classes, the section of the white working classes whose behaviour he finds unacceptable 'have become black'. He thus essentialises whiteness as good (and English) and blackness as its antithesis.

Brah's (1999) reading of the 1976 confrontations of black and Asian young people with the police suggests that the riots were, in part, about redefining and broadening the exclusionary discourses of Britishness that were prevalent at the time. It is striking that Starkey uses the multiethnic riots in summer 2011 implicitly to reproduce the anachronistic, exclusionary, racialised discourses about Britishness and belonging that Brah demonstrates were being resisted by black young people in the 1970s riots.

> A particular sort of violent, destructive, nihilistic gangster culture has become the fashion and black and white, boy and girl operate in this language together. This language which is wholly false, which is a Jamaican patois that's been intruded in England, and this is why so many of us have this sense of literally a foreign country [sic].[5]

5 *ibid*.

By asserting that a 'Jamaican patois' has been 'intruded in England', with the result that 'so many *of us* have this sense of literally a foreign country' (emphasis added), Starkey implicitly constructs African-Caribbean people as 'intruders', outsiders who can be blamed for making the white majority feel like foreigners in their own country. In using 'Jamaican patois' as a signifier of intrusion that has rendered England 'literally' foreign, Starkey is (re)producing

an old debate as illustrated by Brah's analysis of the 1970s discourse of white participants who considered Southall to have been taken over by Asians:

> Here we encounter feminized commonsense with its fantasy of tranquil and tidy rural domesticity which is 'mucked up', disrupted by the 'intruders' with their alien food and unfamiliar smells. There is an overwhelming feeling of being 'taken over', of being soiled and defiled, of things being 'horrible'. The 'intruder' is discursively embodied as a form of aggressive masculinity. Asians come to be represented as having 'taken over', as the discourse converts the transgressed-against into the transgressors. (Brah, 1999: 10)

By racialising the nation into black and white (as in the first extract above), Starkey reproduces the discourses Brah highlights. He represents black people, metonymically symbolised by 'Jamaican patois', as having 'taken over' England and converts them 'into the transgressors'. In his *Newsnight* appearance, Starkey argues that 'it's not skin colour, it's cultural' and extends his auditory, linguistic focus to identify MP David Lammy as 'an archetypical, successful black man' whom he suggests one would think 'white' if only listening to him talk. This construction of whiteness as synonymous with education, eloquence and success implies that blackness is devoid of these characteristics and that any black person who has these attributes can be thought of as white. Starkey's *Newsnight* performance thus shows the enduring utility of Brah's analysis and demonstrates the recursiveness of old racialised discourses and hence their availability to be drawn on (often in new ways) by Catherine and others.

A central part of Brah's (1999) analysis was of 'new racist' discourses (Barker, 1981). 'New racism' refers to the ways in which 'immigration was regarded as having brought to Britain a population that destroyed the cultural homogeneity of the nation and that, as it grew in size, threatened to "swamp" the culture of "our own people" ' (Miles and Brown, 2003: 61). Starkey presents a 'new racist' argument that had already been deconstructed in the early 1980s (CCCS, 1982). By binarising black and white while pathologising blackness, he creates afresh an old racialised hierarchy of belonging.

If Starkey were alone in treating the riots as an opportunity to produce 'new racist' discourses, this would neither indicate that Brah's analysis retains elements relevant to a contemporary analysis, nor illuminate the discourses potentially available to Catherine. However, while Starkey's *Newsnight* appearance generated a 'storm of protest',[6] numerous supporters praised his views on Twitter and in feedback to other media. Equally, other high-profile commentators expressed views commensurate with Starkey's. For example, John Bird, (one of the founders of a UK social business that offers homeless people the opportunity to earn an income through selling *The Big Issue* magazine), alluded to Britain being 'taken over' by black people. In an article in the *Independent* newspaper, Bird wrote that one of the most significant images from the riots was that of a 'shorter, weaker, white boy being made to

6 Quinn, B. (2011) 'David Starkey claims "the whites have become black"' *The Guardian*, 13 August 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/13/david-starkey-claims-whites-black, last accessed 26

strip while a bigger black boy, or man, watches'.[7] He argued that 'supremacy on the street is a black supremacy. It is the uniform of the poor black inner city boldly adopting an identity to say "fuck you" – taking a social position of emptiness and nothingness and making it into a social power statement'.[8] While Bird acknowledged that not all of the rioters were black, he suggested that black people were nonetheless responsible because 'poor inner-city black people are fashion leaders. They are the style leaders. They are the leader. And you follow'.[9] As in Starkey's discourse, Bird presented black young men as powerful 'transgressors' whose 'supremacy' over the streets is problematic. His is a discourse that, to quote Brah (1999: 15), 'embodies the contradictory relationality of "race", gender, class, and ... articulates "power-geometries" of spatiality (Massey, 1999) along these different signifiers of "difference" ' in ways that (re)produce old racist discourses in new forms and reinforce racialised black–white boundaries. Bird's use of 'our' interpellates a 'we' into belonging that makes us feel othered and excluded as black people, just as it others 'poor black inner city' young men.

Following the volume of negative criticism he received, Starkey attempted to defend his *Newsnight* position in an article in the *Telegraph* newspaper.[10] He cited an article written in the *Daily Mirror* newspaper by Tony Parsons, which holds 'the gang culture of black London' responsible for the riots in a variety of English cities. Parsons attributed the riots to a 'generation that is good for nothing and yet scared of nothing'.[11] He claimed that 'without the gang culture of black London, none of the riots would have happened – including the riots in other cities like Manchester and Birmingham where most of rioters [sic] were white'. Parsons argued that this is especially sad for 'all the decent, hard working black men and women in this country' who 'do not deserve to see the clock turned back to the Seventies and Eighties, when racism was overt and vicious. But that is what will happen. The images of black youths running wild will not be quickly forgotten'.[12] Parsons' discourse constructs the riots as making possible a return to overt and vicious racism against black people.

Starkey, Bird and Parsons each racialise the riots and blame black young people. Each does so by drawing on 'new racist' ideas comparable to those Brah demonstrates are central to both popular and political racialised exclusions and inclusions from the local and the national. Each implicitly genders their accounts in that they are primarily focusing on black young men, not women. Their explanations are thus intersectional in bringing together racialisation, gender and (implicitly) social class. Their discourses neither fit with current 'post-race' formulations nor recognise that blackness 'has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found' (Hall, 1996: 116). As Paul Gilroy (2004) describes, culturalist, new racist arguments have residual appeal in postcolonial Britain, and while an emphasis on culture in racial discourse may

September 2011.

7 Bird, 2011: http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/john-bird-fashion-has-become-a-weapon-on-the-streets-of-london-2337838.html. Last accessed 21st August 2011.

8 *ibid*.

9 *ibid*.

10 See Starkey, D. (2011) 'UK riots: it's not about criminality and cuts, it's about culture and this is only the beginning' *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/8711621/UK-riots-Its-not-about-criminality-and-cuts-its-about-culture-and-this-is-onlythe-beginning.html, last accessed 21 August 2011.

11 See Parsons, T. (2011) 'UK riots: why did the riots happen? Who are the rioters? What can we do to end this madness?' *Daily Mirror*, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2011/08/13/uk-riots-tonyparsons-the-britain-we-knew-has-gone-for-ever-115875-23340566/, last accessed 26 August 2011.

12 *ibid*.

seem more benign than the cruder force of biological 'race' theory, it is equally brutal. Gilroy is undoubtedly right that currently 'social and cultural differences are being coded according to the rules of a biological discourse' (2004: 34). However, the commentaries following the 2011 riots show that what is now old 'new racism' continues to be drawn on in popular discourses when this proves expedient, with little attempt to appeal to empirical evidence. Such discourses are, arguably, easily evoked and recognised because they have sedimented into common sense (Gramsci, 1971) and are recursive.

In a *World Have Your Say* programme during the riots, the BBC World Service said that many people who contacted the BBC 'pointed fingers directly at young black men' and the *World Have Your Say* programme asked its audience to respond to the question they posed: 'Is there a problem with young black men, or is society and the media demonising the people at the bottom of the pile?'.[13] While framing the debate in this way reproduces the discourse that Brah described, the reaction to the programme demonstrates that there is also a rupturing of such discursive formations. The BBC was inundated with complaints about this question and apologised for any offence its headline had caused, stating that 'The original headline question that appears online was, in hindsight, too stark and could have been clearer'.[14] However, it is noteworthy that the question ('Is there a problem with young black men?') was a repeat of one asked in 2006 by the same programme following 'an altercation between two groups of black men which had ended in three being shot – and one dying later'.[15] In both cases, the BBC posed a question that invited its international audience to decide whether or not young black men, constructed by the BBC as a homogeneous group, are pathological. This seems an example of how 'new racist' cultural arguments always intersect with gendered constructions (c.f. CCCS, 1982), and/or Gilroy's notion that cultural arguments are being coded into biological discourses.

For Brah, concerned to understand Jean's positioning, an important political question was 'How do we change this "distanciation" of the "macro issues" into more intimate conversations that foster connectedness and understanding?' For us, however, Starkey, Bird and Parsons seem not to be seeking connectedness and understanding, but to assert their viewpoints, which involve pathologising blackness without addressing the underlying political and socio-economic causes of the riots. That their pathologising discourses serve racist ends can be seen clearly in comments made by the far-right British National Party (BNP)[16] that 'multiculturalism' and immigration were to blame for the riots. After Starkey's appearance on *Newsnight*, BNP Chairman Nick Griffin tweeted 'Wondering whether to make David Starkey an honoury [sic] Gold Member for his *Newsnight* appearance'.

In recognition of the concerted opposition to his pronouncements, David Starkey gave an interview to *The Voice* black weekly newspaper (Richards, 2011), in which

13 McGovern N. (2011) WHYS 60: England riots. *World Have Your Say. BBC World Service*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00j84dk/World_Have_Your_Say_WHYS_60_England_riots/, accessed 21 August 2011.

14 BBC spokesperson cited in Burrell, I. (2011) 'BBC forced to apologise again for riots coverage' *The Independent*, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/tv-radio/bbc-forced-to-apologise-again-for-riots-coverage-2338180.html, last accessed 22 August 2011.

15 Atkins R. (2006) 'Is there a problem with young black men?' *BBC World Service, World Have Your Say Blog*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/worldhaveyoursay/2006/11/is_there_a_problem_with_young.html, accessed 21 August 2011.

16 British National Party. (2011) 'London burning

he claimed that 'I'm a white man not black, therefore I'm not allowed to speak'. The implication that his pronouncements would have been acceptable if voiced by a black man erroneously assumes that those who have criticised his comments are more concerned with essentialist embodiment than with content. His defence of his position also demonstrates how a range of rhetorical devices are frequently marshalled to warrant unpalatable claims. In this case, Starkey denies that he needs to apologise for what he said (although he agrees that it was inappropriate to have mentioned Enoch Powell), and, instead, uses various rhetorical strategies to warrant his version of the causes of the riots:

> I'm absolutely not, in anyway [sic] possible, racist. I think racists are demented. I was born crippled, with two left feet and had to wear surgical boats [sic] until I was in my early teens. I turned out to be gay and I had to wear spectacles from the age of nine.
>
> I've been on the receiving end as well. I know about prejudice and what hurt feels like. I have been abused by a policeman. It's not about skin colour, it's about how people are brought up. (Starkey, quoted in Richards, 2011: 2)

It appears that Starkey's aim here is to generate sympathy in *The Voice* readership (most of whom are black) by giving personal information designed to position him as relatively powerless and vulnerable. This functions as defensive prolepsis (in much the same way as Catherine denies racism in the previous section), allowing him to deny charges of racism, particularly since he asserts that 'racists are demented' (c.f. Billig, 1991). In addition, Starkey constructs himself as knowing how it feels to be hurt by prejudice. In order to buttress his claims to expert knowledge, he draws on 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1991) and intersectionality by presenting his whiteness (which could potentially position him as powerful) as decentred by disability and homosexuality. He does not draw on his disciplinary expertise as a historian, but uses identity as a resource to construct positions from which it is legitimate to pontificate (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). In the above extract, Starkey also makes claims that can be read as psychosocial from the vantage point of the social sciences since he brings in the personal and emotional to legitimate his social analyses.

It is important to acknowledge, as Brah recognised in her discussion of the riots in the 1970s, that many people resist pathologising discourses. Arguments such as those explored in this section are far from the only ones that have claimed media attention since the 2011 riots. While the above examples racialise the debate in essentialising and exclusionary ways, other commentators have taken a more nuanced, complex view. For example, Patricia Daley, a black British Caribbean lecturer at Oxford University, who grew up on the Pembury estate in Hackney, London (a borough that adjoins Tower Hamlets), suggests 'In a television debate, the historian, David Starkey, blames the riots on whites becoming black by adopting black culture; thus implying that black culture is dysfunctional. Many commentators have attacked the racism of much of his

after three days of race riots', http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/london-burning-after-three-days-race-riots, accessed 21 August 2011.

retort'.[17] Similarly, in a letter published in *Times Higher Education*, a group of more than one hundred historians, social theorists and graduates argued that David Starkey was a 'singularly poor choice' for the BBC *Newsnight* programme. They censured the 'poverty' of Starkey's 'reductionist argument', which was 'evidentially insupportable and factually wrong' and suggested that this was unsurprising given that 'Starkey has professed himself to be a historian of elites, and his academic work has never focused on race and class'. They also critiqued the way in which the BBC represented Starkey's opinions 'as those of a "historian" ' given that 'as even the most basic grasp of cultural history would show' the views Starkey presented on the programme have no basis in research or evidence. 'In particular, his crass generalisations about black culture and white culture as oppositional, monolithic entities demonstrate a failure to grasp the subtleties of race and class that would disgrace a first-year history undergraduate'.[18]

Unlike Catherine's account above, Starkey, Bird and Parsons' pronouncements are public media accounts designed to be opinion (in)forming. It is not, therefore, possible to do biographically-informed psychosocial readings of them. It would, of course, be possible to investigate their lives and biographies with a view to understanding how these accounts function for them. For the purposes of our analyses here and of 'writing back' to 'The Scent of Memory', however, it is more relevant to examine their impact within a postcolonial context that various theorists suggest is melancholic because histories of slavery and colonialism remain unacknowledged (Gilroy, 2004; Flax, 2010). Starkey's proclamation that 'we will not continue, I think, to tolerate being lied to and cheated in the matter of race'[19] can thus be read as a moral pronouncement, which claims that being 'honest' about 'race' requires accepting that a black 'gangsta culture' has been adopted by 'chavs' and lies at the heart of current social ills. This rhetoric ignores both the multiethnic nature of the riots and the multiple and complex reasons they took hold in various locations, as well as the history of racialisation and racism in the United Kingdom. This ignoring of the 'history of the present' serves, in Brah's (1999: 10) terms, to convert 'the transgressed-against into the transgressors' and is racist in effect. Starkey's approach runs counter to current work by narrative analysts, psychoanalysts and social scientists that analyses the interpenetration of 'big' (social) and 'small' (personal) histories (e.g. Davoine and Gaudillière, 2004; Freeman, 2008; Flax, 2011; Walkerdine *et al.*, in press) and to the approach taken in 'The Scent of Memory', which contextualises Jean's personal story historically and socio-economically.

The three sets of discourses presented in this second section of the paper, together with the BBC 'World Have Your Say' discussion topic, work to construct part of the context in which racialisation takes exclusionary, racist forms in ways similar to those identified by Brah (1999). For Catherine, living in contemporary

17 See Daley, P. (2011) 'Recalling 1970s London: has life improved since for the young, poor and black?' Open Democracy, 19 August 2011, http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/patricia-daley/recalling-1970s-london-has-life-improved-since-for-young-poor-and-black, last accessed 27 August 2011.

18 Munslow A., Gilroy P., Sayer D., Constantine S., and 99 others. (2011) 'Starkey's ignorance is hardly work of history'. Letter to THE, 25–31 August 2011: 28, http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=417236, last accessed 26 August 2011.

19 See Starkey, D. (2011) 'UK riots: it's not about criminality and cuts, it's about culture and this is only the beginning' *The Telegraph*, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/8711621/UK-riots-Its-not-about-criminality-and-cuts-its-about-culture-and-this-is-onlythe-beginning.html, last accessed 21 August 2011.

postcolonial London, such pronouncements constitute the context in which her racialised subjectification is enabled. They produce a legible subjectivity for her to occupy (c.f. Butler, 2004) that helps to give her life value and meaning. Discourses of this kind are interpellative, hailing us all into different emotionally-marked subjectivities and so exposing 'the hollowness in the mantra "we are all in it together" '.[20] Thus, while such discourses highlight the ways in which we are all interlinked in complex ways in Brah's (1996) 'diaspora space', they also demonstrate how we are positioned differentially in power relations. From a psychosocial perspective, the ready availability of racist discourses that are repeated across time, but draw on new elements to warrant their claims helps to explain why Catherine's biographical insecurities are linked with her racialisation of Bangladeshi mothers, and hence why 'The Scent of Memory' was innovative in taking what we now recognise as a psychosocial approach.

20 See Daley, P. (2011) 'Recalling 1970s London: has life improved since for the young, poor and black?' Open Democracy, 19 August 2011, http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/patricia-daley/recalling-1970s-london-has-life-improved-since-for-young-poor-and-black, last accessed 27 August 2011.

conclusions

The two sets of analyses in this paper relate to accounts produced in very different contexts for different purposes. Catherine told the story of her pregnancy and birth to a research interviewer in the privacy of her own home. In contrast, Starkey, Bird and Parsons made public pronouncements about the causes and implications of the 2011 UK riots. There are thus important differences in their aims. Nonetheless, our reading of 'The Scent of Memory' and analyses of the interview with Catherine and the racialising responses to the 2011 riots have shown the power of racialised interpellation to 'other' black and minoritised ethnic people in Britain. Although now old, what was identified as 'new racism' in the 1980s is still being evoked in attempts to position black and minoritised ethnic people lower on the hierarchy of belonging than their white counterparts. By focusing on 'culture' as opposed to skin colour or ethnic origin, both Catherine (in her interview) and Starkey, Parsons and Bird (in their post-riot commentaries) seek to avoid critiques of their discourses as racist at the same time as they homogenise and pathologise Asian or black people. Juxtaposing the two sets of accounts highlights the relational nature of interpellation and of the psychosocial space of racialisation.

It is disturbing that in 2011 commentators are predicting a return to the racism of the 1970s and 1980s[21] while reviving racist discourses from that era. Just as Brah (1999) discusses the ways in which class differences were obscured and racialised in the 'new racist' discourses she examined, so the effects of poverty on social cohesion and disaffection, while evident, are left implicit in Catherine's narratives and in Starkey, Bird and Parsons' commentaries. We would have liked to have been able to write back to Brah, meditating on how much the socio-political situation has changed since she wrote 'The Scent of Memory' in 1999. There have undoubtedly been many hopeful changes since the 1970s, so that

21 For example, Parsons, T. (2011) 'UK riots: why did the riots happen? Who are the rioters? What can we do to end this madness?' *Daily Mirror*, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2011/08/13/uk-

riots-tonyparsons-the-britain-we-knew-has-gone-for-ever-115875-23340566/, last accessed 26 August 2011.

some spaces can now be characterised as 'convivial multicultures' (Gilroy, 2004; Rampton *et al*., 2010). However, the response to the 2011 riots has shown how the scent of pathologising discourses and 'new racism' lingers on.

Brah (1999: 24) draws her meditation to a close, citing the novelist Toni Morrison. 'What a wonderful title – *Beloved*! Wonderful because it heals even as it opens the intimate wounds'. We would like to end our 'writing back' with similar optimism. As much as Catherine's narrative may be painful for those it others and as much as Starkey, Bird and Parsons' racist discourses have incensed, offended and wounded, there is something healing about the challenge to the 'new racist' discourses that the 2011 riots elicited. Starkey, and no doubt Bird and Parsons have their supporters and gain privilege from attempts to impose their partial perspectives (Haraway, 1991). Numerous voices, however, will not stay silent and allow them to distort and monopolise a much-needed debate, one to which 'The Scent of Memory' continues to make a thought-provoking contribution.

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