Black Feminism
Womanism
and the
Politics of Women of Colour
in
Europe

University of Edinburgh
Saturday, 3rd September 2016
Black Feminism, Womanism and the Politics of Women of Colour in Europe

3rd September 2016
University of Edinburgh
50 George Square

Programme

9.00 Registration

9.30 Welcome

Building Black Feminist Solidarity Across Europe
Akwugo Emejulu
Lecture Theatre G.03

******

10.00 Roundtable Discussions Session 1

Panel 1: The Art of Social Change
Facilitator: Francesca Sobande
Room No: G.01

Shagufta Iqbal: Feminism, Art and Activism
Lynette Goddard: debbie tucker green: Black British Feminism and Transnational Contexts
Maria Mercone: Women of Colour in Italian Culture: A Decolonising Practice
Lennie St Luce ‘Belief’, ‘Who me?’ and ‘First Lesson of the Goddess’
Panel 2: Gendering Migration Experiences #1
Facilitator: Kate Sang
Room No: G.02

Ima Jackson: Has Anything Changed? The Experience of Old and New Black and Migrant Nurses in Scotland
Gabrielle Hesk: In Between Space that is Neither Here or There: Mixed Race Migratory Subjectivities

Panel 3: The Politics of ‘Home’
Facilitator: Geetha Marcus
Room No: G.05

Oluwatoyosi Teriba: An Anatomy of ‘Home’: Theorising Precarity Diasporic Experiences of Women of Colour
Gabriella Beckles-Raymond: House Party Revisited: Theorising the Home and Reimagining Traditions of Transformative Spaces
Fanny Essiye: An Afrofeminist View on France’s Historical Obliviousness

*****
11.30 Coffee Break

*****
11.45 Roundtable Discussions Session 2

Panel 4: Black Feminist/AfroFeminist Collectives in Conversation
Facilitator: Akwugo Emejulu
Room No: G.01

AfroFem: We Call Ourselves Afrofeminists
Matters of the Earth: Imagining a World Where All Black Lives Matter
Marly Pierre-Louis and Tracian Meikle: We Out Here: Spacemaking and Sisterhood in Amsterdam
Ain’t I a Woman Collective: Online/Offline Unification in Borderless Time

Panel 5: Frameworks for Understanding Black Women’s Lives
Facilitator: Francesca Sobande
Room No: G.02

Obasi Chijioke: Africanist Sista-hood in Britain: Debating Black Feminism, Womanism and Africana Womanism
Francesca Sobande: The Nuances of Attempting to Make a Black Feminist Academic Contribution: Navigating the British Context and Disciplinary Boundaries
Kimberley Osivwemu: Social Work Practice as Black Feminist Activism
Panel 6: Gendering Migration Experiences #2
Facilitator: Geetha Marcus
Room No: G.05

Kajal Nisha Patel: Woven Spirit: Documenting British South Asian Women and the Interplay between Power, Dreams and Struggle
Amandine Gay: The Depoliticisation of Transracial Adoption
Geetha Marcus: The Intersecting Invisible Experiences of Gypsy/Traveller Girls in Scotland

*****

13.15 Lunch

*****

14.15 Roundtable Discussions Session 3

Panel 7: Telling Black Women’s Stories
Facilitator: Francesca Sobande
Room No: G.01

Claire Heuchan: As A Blackwoman: Poetry and the Politics of Identity in Scotland
Jennifer Ndidi Iroh and Njideka Stephanie Iroh: Queer Black Feminist Her*storytelling
Lea Hülsen: Representations of Agency and Liminality in the Work of Black Female Caribbean Intellectuals
Panel 8: Self Care as Political Warfare
Facilitator: Orlanda Ward
Room No: G.02

Iris Rajanayagam and Mai Zeidani Yufanyi: White Men Sleep Best
Joanne Wilson: Space to Speak: The Invisibility and Erasure of African-Caribbean British in Discourses of Equality
Claudia Garcia-Rojas: (Un)Disciplined Desires: Women of Colour Feminism as a Disruptive to White Affect Studies
Kavita Maya: The Spiritual is Political: A Black Feminist Analysis of Contemporary Integrative Spirituality

Panel 9: Black Feminist Activism and Resistance
Facilitator: Geetha Marcus
Room No: G.05

Diane Watt and Adele Jones: Building Black Feminist and Womanist Spaces
Andrea Tara-Chand: Implications of the ‘War on Terror’ for Muslim Women in Britain: Narratives of Resistance and Resilience
Layla-Roxanne Hill: Digitalisation of Diasporas: From Mass Social Media to Advancing Mobilisation

*****
15.45 Coffee Break
*****

16.00 Keynote: Cecile Emeke
Lecture Theatre G.03

17.30 Concluding Remarks: Imagining a Black Feminist Europe

Drinks and dinner from 18.30 at Spoon
Black Feminism, Womanism and the Politics of Women of Colour in Europe

Abstracts

Morning Panels and Roundtable Discussions

Panel 1: The Art of Social Change

Shagufta Iqbal: Art and Female Voices in Public spaces

Creator of the 'Borders' documentary, a poetry film that addresses the 1970s & 1980s virginity teasing scandal at Heathrow airport on South Asian female immigrants. Shagufta K draws on her own experience as an artist, and examines how women use art to engage with public spaces. The roles and expectations that exist for female creatives within the British Arts culture, and how women are going about challenging this. How female artists are getting their voices heard, and the way they are using the arts as a tool for social change, particularly within a larger global framework of artistic exchange.

Shagufta K, is a feminist poet, film and theatre maker, based in Bristol.

Lynette Goddard: debbie tucker green: Black British Feminism and Transnational Contexts

Since emerging onto the British theatre scene in 2003, debbie tucker green has garnered substantial critical attention where connections are drawn with prominent white European playwrights and themes of analysis in post 9/11 theatre scholarship. However, tucker green has said “I just don't see it [...] I think it says more about critics’ reference points than my work.” [...] “I’m a black woman. I write black characters. That is part of my landscape.” bell hooks' argument for a greater awareness of global issues within
feminist activism is reflected in Elaine Aston’s suggestion that Tucker Green’s plays foreground concerns about ‘feminist fatigue’ and the ‘loss of feminism’, demonstrating the need for increased awareness of transnational black women’s human rights within British feminist discourses. This paper examines how Stoning Mary (2005), Trade (2007), and Truth and Reconciliation (2011) raise awareness of global human rights concerns. The combination of subject matter that focuses on global crises (e.g. child soldiers, AIDS, female sex tourism, genocide, crises in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Zimbabwe) and the use of specific dramatic devices, such as cross (gender and racial) casting, experimental language, and settings, underline the social and political impact of portraying black African and Caribbean women’s human rights issues within European theatrical contexts. Tucker Green consciously positions (predominantly white) mainstream British theatre audiences as empathetic witnesses to some of the realities of the ways in which racism and sexism continue to shape black experience, locally and globally, and questions how feminist concepts such as sisterhood and solidarity translate into making effective responses to black women’s human rights concerns. Her plays epitomise how mainstream black British playwrights’ representations of topical black social issues have raised debates to effect social change.

Maria Mercone: Women of Colour in Italian Culture: A Decolonising Practice

In Italy – in the public debate as well as in the medias and in a large part of the academic environment – the order of the discourse continues to perpetrate a black women’s narration imbued with colonial references. On one hand we can find a representation of the black womanhood which evokes the stereotype of the “exotic sensuality” linked to the romanticized aspects of the colonial conquest, on the other hand we can find the victimized migrant, a figure with no agency, no choice, no voice, a fragile individual oppressed by every social, political and economic dispositive. I would like to show these two aspects of the stereotyped black womanhood through the Italian cinematographic production – analyzing in particular the movies and the documentaries of the latest years that deal with the issue of migration – and through the comparison between the current representation of black women’s body and the colonial one. I would propose an attempt of
decolonization of that stereotyped discourse fabricated upon women of color in Italy in order to subvert the dominant canon of “exoticism” and “victimhood”, trying to underline the spaces and modalities of resistance to that canon expressed by migrant women and Afro-Italian women. This action of deconstruction can be useful to draw the links across Black European women, to investigate the possibility of the construction of a transnational movement which will be able to dismantle the assumption of their invisibility in the European social space.

Lennie St Luce ‘Belief’, ‘Who me?’ and ‘First Lesson of the Goddess’

How many of our choices in daily life are based on the legacy of slavery?
Were we manumitted because the chains of the One Man God are sufficient slavery?
What is an Afropean?
Where are transgender women on black feminism and womanism?
Should we re-align our spirituality to a woman/earth centric foundation?
Can we dialogue about our collusion in our own oppression as a starting point for our liberation?

Lennie is a performance artist and grass roots liberationist.

Panel 2: Gendering Migration Experiences #1

Ima Jackson: Has Anything Changed? The Experience of Old and New Black and Migrant Nurses in Scotland

This paper develops from the practical experiences of Black nurses who came to Scotland in the 1950s and 60s and those who have come more recently as migrants, often with a refugee and asylum seeker migration perspective. Black and migrant nurses have a long history in health care in Scotland as in the rest of the UK yet the experience of hypervisibility, lack of voice, racial discrimination and institutional obstruction continues and has resulted in the persistent trend towards a lack of personal and professional recognition. There has been a tendency in Scotland to view Black and overseas nurses’ participation as something that is short term, is new and may well end soon, rather than the perspective that the social make up of Scotland, the UK and Europe is constantly
changing and migration and in particular the increase of female migration is creating this change.

There are few opportunities for nurses who come from a diverse background and/or recently migrated to openly share their experience. In an attempt to provide historical context to that experience and create a safe space, a witness seminar was organised.

Facilitating an opportunity for those who managed to sustain a satisfying career (and from those who did not) to recount and describe the skills they used to resist, to protect and support both their professional and personal selves within a climate of institutionalised inequality and discrimination, aims to bear witness and to learn. Working together in this way is viewed as a creative method to support the ongoing development of spaces for resistance, naming and claiming of experience.


The construction of feminist analysis of women’s oppressions is at odds with the experience of not only the reproductive but also the productive labour of racial ethnic minority women in racially structured labour systems. With labour as an arena in which groups have contested their marginalization and exploitation, this paper discusses the gendered nature of the migrant penalty Nigerian women face in the Irish labour market. It brings into the same frame, racial stratification and patriarchy—two major structures through which racial and gender inequality are shaped. It addresses how their contemporaneous occurrence produces invisibilised dilemmas in the lives of Black Nigerian women in the labour market, the strategies through which they are negotiated and contested and the resulting identity reconstruction. The data was generated from a comparative study, which employed critical race theory’s counter-storytelling to investigate the disparity in outcomes among migrants. It involved 32 semi-structured interviews of first generation migrants of Spanish, Polish and Nigerian descent in the Irish labour Market and the analysis of the 2009 to 2011 EPIC employability programme database [N=296]. The paper argues that when gender studies and methodology do not give adequate attention to the interaction
of racial stratification and patriarchy, it becomes complicit in the proliferation of racial inequality; it exacerbates the silencing of marginalised groups particularly Black women whose issues are left unaddressed by mainstream gender studies who uses them as quintessential intersectional subjects. Lastly, it argues that continual failure to reflect how racial stratification interacts with other vulnerabilities to systematically exclude Black women at the bottom of the racial ladder in racially stratified societies increases tensions among feminist and feminist methodology.

Gabrielle Hesk: In Between Space that is Neither Here or There: Mixed Race Migratory Subjectivities

Born out of conversations between my mother and I over the last few years, this personal reflection examines the complexity being a mixed race Black woman in relation to my white mother. This reflection deconstructs the complexity of the intersection of migration, racism, sexism, disability and class within the space and place of the dynamics of our mother/daughter/daughter/mother relationship. Using concepts of ‘migration’ and ‘borders’ as metaphors to explore what Carol Boyce Davies describes as the ‘in between space that is neither here or there’ (1994:1) this reflection addresses:

• ‘Migratory subjectivity’ as the process of inclusion and exclusion across the borders of oppressive social constructions to the lived emotional experience of being a mixed race Black woman in relation to my white mother.
• The ways race as a system of visibility uses the ‘gaze’ as a tool of regulation through inconsistent processes of recognition and misrecognition. Here I am reminded of Sojourner Truth’s statement ‘Ain’t I a woman’ and the numerous times I had to assert, ‘Ain’t I my mother’s daughter and my mother had to repeat, ‘Ain’t I the mother of my daughter’.
• The ways in which as mother and daughter we, as individuals and together from our particular standpoints made use of what Patricia Hill Collins calls “subjugated knowledge’s” of “the matrix of domination”. In this reflection I bring to life ‘The re-negotiating of identities’ in the historical and social context spanning the period from the 1950’s through to the present day.
• In exploring ‘the politics of location’ of being a Black woman with a white mother, I hope to deconstruct ‘a whole
host of identifications and associations around concepts of place, placement, displacement; location, dis-location; memberment, dis-memberment; citizenship, alienness; boundaries, barriers, transportations; peripheries, cores and centres. It is about positionality in geographic, historical, social, economic, educational terms. It is about positionality in society based on class, gender, sexuality, age, and income. It is also about relationality and the ways in which one is able to access, mediate or reposition oneself, or pass into other spaces given certain other circumstances’ (Boyce Davies 1994:153.)

References

Panel 3: The Politics of ‘Home’

Oluwatoyosi Teriba: An Anatomy of ‘Home’: Theorising Precarity Diasporic Experiences of Women of Colour

The common demand for people of colour in the UK to ‘go home’ is just one of the many microaggressions which reaffirm the idea of non-white people as alien to Europe. This geographical component to non-white otherisation produces a gender experience rooted in existential instability. As we see a growth of immigration struggles from Calais to Yarls Wood, it makes sense to revisit the centrality of immigration to British Black feminist analysis. Thus, this paper seeks to move towards a theorisation of the inherent precarity to reframe diasporic experiences of WoC in the UK.

Black experiences outside Africa have typically been mediated through the imagined monolith of the Afro-American experience. While the loss imposed on African Americans by trans-Atlantic slave trade has produced distinctive cultures, converging around this process as a shared origin story, the experience of diasporic communities is far more diverse. I seek to draw out the implications of a central point of difference – precarity.

Through the lens of immigration struggles, I interrogate the experiences of WoC in the UK as a palimpsest of “homes”: a duality which thrusts identity into flux, driving us towards
fragmentary impulses. In locating precarity as an intersection of geographic and intergenerational inheritances, I will problematize post-colonial conceptions of indigeneity. In light of this, I will argue for reassessing the demobilising implications of contemporary privilege discourses in the British context. I will then sketch how black feminism in the UK historically centred on radically different notions of “blackness” to dominant discourses. “Political blackness”, once a powerful means of mobilisation, is fraught with contradiction and contestation.

As feminists of colour in Britain increasingly take on the language and analyses of their US counterparts, the idea of a liberatory solidarity, rooted in reciprocal recognition seems to move even further out of reach.

**Gabriella Beckles-Raymond: House Party Revisited: Theorising the Home and Reimagining Traditions of Transformative Spaces**

In the tradition of the house party, which was an important site of entertainment and resistance for people of Caribbean decent in the UK, who were excluded from or unwelcome in certain social spaces in post-war Britain. Indeed, the significance of the home and black women who are often understood as the primary figure within the home has become a trope in both popular culture, “Big Moma’s House” for example, and in literary and academic circles as the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press founded by Barbra Smith is a testament. In this paper I suggest the home regardless of its geography and in contrast to formalized spaces like the academy is the kind of small space where transformative theory can emerge. Dichotomization of public and private spheres in keeping with Western ideological traditions, have meant that the home is not typically viewed as a sphere for reasoning. And yet, in the history of colonized peoples the home has functioned as a place where ideas have emerged for reasons worthy of consideration. First, a refocus on the home as a site of theoretical production is itself transformative, as it allows us to redefine the gendered value of the home and remember its importance in the history of ideas. Second, being beyond the public gaze and in some respects legally protected as a private sphere, the home gives us greater control over the ideological influences that help us reimagine how we view these small spaces. Third, the home as a microcosm of society has the potential to either perpetuate or transform the
ideologies of domination that exist beyond its domain. Thus transforming those ideologies in the home forms the intellectual basis of new and more just societies. In rearticulating the home as a site of theoretical influence, we reassert our traditions of transformative ideas in small spaces and reimagine a strategic future for radical theory and practice.

Fanny Essiye: An Afrofeminist View on France’s Historical Obliviousness

I first encountered Black feminism on the Internet. Thanks to twitter, I started to follow black French girls (and especially Mrs. Dreydful) who shared with their audience some works about American Black Feminism. I never heard of such things before. I was accepting the label “feminist” before but it actually seemed so white, and never matched my interest for racial issues, who came much sooner in my life. When I first read those words, I thought “My god, these American Black feminists are speaking my truth! The truth of my mother and grandmother”. Later on, I found some subtitles differences between Afro-American women and mine and historical differences answered to me. “Why, as a French black girl, are those texts reasoning so much? And why can’t I find French referents about those issues here?”

The thing is, racial issues aren’t that much discussed in France. President Hollande actually erased the word “race” of the Constitution because “race is no such thing”. Behind this colorblind story, the racial issues stay hidden, unsaid, and the stories of racial justice stay untold. France loves to point America (especially in the media) as the western country with so much racially charged history but fails to acknowledge its own racial history. Because of this idea of citizenship created by the Lie Republic, which was supposed, to erase the differences between citizens, this “mythe républicain”, France built this “colorblind” story who makes it almost impossible for activist and racialized people (ie: People of color) to know the actors of the struggle for racial justice.

In consequence, actual afrofeminist work and collectives have been completely erased from the social movements history. This is why for me, it is so important to work to create spaces to build French Afrofeminism and recreate French Afrofeminism history and find influence inside of the European continent.
Because of the stories of immigrants, it is necessary for me to add the invaluable work of Sub-Saharan feminists (Fatou Sow for example, who is an important voice in African feminism) or Caribbean feminists like Paulette Nardal as influences in that diasporic perspective and I am eager to know more about my European sisters’ struggle.

As a French Afrofeminist, I think one of the ways to break this “amnesia” and this “mythe républicain” is to emphasize the role of former activists, in France and Europe. I think it is urgent to counter the ideologies of “closing borders” which are in vogue in Europe at the moment by constructing bridges between countries. In another hand, I find it most interesting to see afrofeminist movements, views, and struggles emerges within former colonial empires and how this is handled in those different countries.

Panel 4: Black Feminist/AfroFeminist Collectives in Conversation

AfroFem: We Call Ourselves Afrofeminists

We are a French-Belgian organisation named " Afro-Fem" created in March 2012 by several Black-European women. We do lot of work as cyber-activists on the Internet. We like to call ourselves Afrofeminists. The point is to define and theorise what the movement is about in Europe.

It is important for us to distinguish Afrofeminism from black feminism and womanism. The stories are not the same of course, but we include the different identities that compose our movement. Here in Europe, we have different stories of slavery, with Caribbean and African islands and different stories of colonization and migrations.

Women who take part to Afrofeminism are not only "black" they have their own origins, they own culture, their own religion, some of us are born in Europe, other are born in Africa or in French islands even in south America. Sometimes we have stories of war between our home countries, some history we have to work with. Especially for the mixed race women who don't define themselves as "black" in Europe, but can be part of the movement because they are "afro-descendent" as well. In Europe being "black" is not enough to define people. That's why we 've chosen "Afrofeminism".

The most important aspect for our movement is not only to fight racism and sexism, but also to unify all black women in Europe. It is important to speak from the same voice. This is
challenging because not only we are from different countries, but also we live in different countries in Europe and don't speak the same languages. Before fighting the oppression, we have to organize ourselves like the Afro-Latina’s movement that reunited all black women from South America.

Matters of the Earth: Imagining a World Where All Black Lives Matter

Matters of the Earth is a social justice organisation, bridging the gaps between the academic, activist and creative worlds by (re)imagining knowledge for empowerment and engagement. This outstanding collective of creatives contribute towards ‘Intersectional Liberation’ for ALL Black Lives around the world – combining activist, artistic and academic specialism to facilitate the organising, strengthening and building of movements.

Matters of the Earth are acutely aware of the need to centre Black Women narratives in any freedom movement – and that these narratives need to be localised. Black & Female (trans & cis) European narratives within our organising work must be continuously (re)crafted and (re)imagined, and need to be at the core of Black European organising generally.

We need to continue to (re)imagine our own narratives in order to centre what is true for us as Black European women. The Black Lives Matter Network has been successful to date because of its commitment to grassroots internationalism, skill-sharing and centralised guiding principles. This way organisers can hold each other accountable while developing in their own contexts.

This talk will stress the usability and essential value of the imagination for radical and sustainable transformation; paying particular attention to the work of activist organisations and grassroots organisers in UK and US contexts who are committed to transnational alliances. We explore how Black women in Europe might continue to fight for a just and free world creatively, restoratively and collectively, utilising the rich history of Black women in the US –of which members of our collective have had first-hand experience– to evolve and strengthen our own European movement-building strategies. Moreover, with an emphasis on devising strategy and organising
practices, we look towards the dismantling of patriarchal oppression, recentering matriarchal revolutionary principles and Audre Lorde’s uses of the Erotic as feminine power. The purpose of this talk is to imagine a world in which ALL Black Lives Matter. In exploring what this world might look like; we suggest that critical imagination and creative resilience can and must play a key role in this transformation - indeed, it is with this creativity and resilience that Black women rise up, everyday.

We value the importance of grassroots and local organising that both celebrates the contributions of and centers the requirements of those who are organising. In order that change is sustainable, transformational and inclusive, the movement must have intersectional leadership. By examining the strategies and guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement and of our own organisation Matters of the Earth, this talk will offer self-analytical political strategies for organisations and individual activists who are committed to the liberation of Black Lives in Europe through the centering of Black women’s narratives.

Marly Pierre-Louis and Tracian Meikle: We Out Here: Spacemaking and Sisterhood in Amsterdam

In the Netherlands, white women set the tone for what feminism is and what woman centric spaces look like. There are rare instances and few spaces for Black women expats to find and connect with one another. The overwhelming whiteness of the Netherlands and the constant threat of erasure can lead to feelings of isolation even in parts of the city where there exists a decent population of Black women.

In this presentation, we will discuss the Amsterdam Black Women Meetup (ABWM). This group was founded by 5 Black women, in an effort to unite Black women expats seeking community in Amsterdam. The foundation of this collective lies in the creation of social and political safe spaces for Black women. The ABWM aims to resist erasure of Black womanhood by uplifting and making visible our sisterhood.

Our methods are achieved through intentional space making that seeks to address the unique needs and challenges of Black women expats. In addition to events like monthly brunches, networking socials and orientation for new arrivals, ABWM
pursues opportunities to support and uplift Black owned businesses, entrepreneurs and activists.

ABWM brings together international practices and rituals of Black womanhood and sisterhood. Building on the words of Maya Angelou – “I don’t trust any revolution where love is not allowed”, the ABWM seeks to use radical love as its creative ideology. It is our belief that building community spaces where Black women can thrive and fully exist can be one of the most powerful and transformative actions in a world that constantly forces Black women to reduce themselves in order survive the glare of the white patriarchal gaze.

Ain’t I a Woman Collective: Online/Offline Unification in Borderless Time

Black feminism has always been necessary. For Angela Davis, it “emerged as a theoretical and practical effort” which demonstrated that “race, gender, and class are inseparable in the social worlds we inhabit.” Indeed, as black women and society at large struggled with understanding this complexity in the 60s, so too do we struggle today. However, these issues and the way we experience them seem to have undergone a transformation in our digitally connected world. Beyond this, there are renewed issues of migration, austerity measures, and other socio-political concerns that challenge our understanding and practice of black feminism in Europe today, and how we communicate them to each other.

As a Collective of young women with African ancestry who strive to build black feminist [activist] spaces both online and offline, we often ask where black feminism stands today, and how organisations such as the AIAWC can push the boundaries beyond non-white European feminism. Given the aforementioned contemporary issues that influence feminist processes, along with ongoing conversations based on 20th century black feminist rhetoric, the future of black feminism in Europe appears to be progressive and stationary at the same time.

We examine the use of online spaces in aiding the unification of black feminist activism by creating outlets for reflection, whilst considering the future of offline spaces. We ask whether our narratives are aiding our future in growing borderless times. Ultimately, we question what it means to
have a European black feminism: is it one whose agenda is not dictated by America’s social justice movements? One that interrogates the place of African women in the migrant crisis? One which counters islamophobic discourse and fights austerity measures sweeping through Europe? Ultimately, it seeks to address – and redress – the historical narratives that obliterate Black women’s contribution to present-day Europe.

Panel 5: Frameworks for Understanding Black Women’s Lives

Obasi Chijioke: Africanist Sista-hood in Britain: Debating Black Feminism, Womanism and Africana Womanism

Attempts have been made to provide an analytical framework for Black women that centralises our experiences and perspectives both as individuals and collectives. Much of this work has focused on Black feminism emanating from America, but this does not provide adequate reflection on the specific situation in Britain. Developments in Black British feminism have gone some way to address this, however it is the British context that brings with it issues of contestation around who is considered Black which are also translated into this discourse. Difficulties around the use of existing feminist frameworks with their roots embedded in racism and the marginalisation of Black women has caused some to declare their difficulty with the theory and more resolutely the terminology of feminism. Womanism has provided a useful alternative but in Britain has had much less appeal or recognition.

Discussions of ‘Africanist Sista-hood in Britain’ offers original terminology whilst highlighting points of connection with and divergence from existing theories in an attempt to regenerate long standing debates about epistemological and ontological understandings of Black womanhood. It recognises the specific location of Black women in Britain and is reflective of the race, class and gender relations that affect us.

The paper draws on some of the existing literature in the field in order to re-visit existing perspectives and move debates forward. A theoretical framework termed ‘Africanist Sista-hood in Britain’ (Obasi, 2014) is discussed as a framework of analysis developed by adopting elements of Black feminism, womanism and Africana womanism. Within it is the recognition of the importance and value of collectivity, connectivity, commonality and difference amongst Black women, where lived experience and self-definition are held in high
regard. In discussions of Africanist Sista- hood in Britain I aim to add further contribution to existing emancipatory frameworks that seek to ‘foreground the cognitive authority of subjugated knowers’ (May, 2014).

Francesca Sobande: The Nuances of Attempting to Make a Black Feminist Academic Contribution: Navigating the British Context and Disciplinary Boundaries

My work examines some of the ways that Black feminist thought has been overlooked and erased in the context of the British higher education system. This includes reflection on particular disciplines, which ostensibly appear to be more receptive to such perspectives.

This paper explores how Black feminist approaches more broadly have been framed as being merely an-Other particular, political and personal perspective, as well as being deemed as having little relevance in the context of academia, especially outside of the imagined confines of race studies and gender studies. Furthermore, there is consideration of how British cultural narratives concerning race, as well as the dismissiveness of particular counter-narratives, yield a context within which discussions about systemic oppression related to race may be reframed and quashed.

This paper poses and engages with questions such as; why and how have Black feminist approaches been erased and mobilised in the British higher education system? Do theorists have to choose between making a disciplinary contribution and a Black feminist one? What are some of the nuanced challenges that Black feminist academics may face in the UK and what are some of the obstacles and opportunities presented by disciplinary parameters? My work is intended to facilitate further discussion about some of the particularities of attempting to make an academic contribution from a Black feminist perspective in the UK.

Kimberley Osivwemu: Social Work Practice as Black Feminist Activism

As an example of practice that advocates Black Feminist theory as relevant and crucially informative social work theory in European discourse. This piece presents a practitioner perspective through a Black Feminist Activist lens, which aims
to add to theory and in so doing inform practice.

In examining a presentation of social pedagogy (hooks, b) as an approach to social work with a young woman who self-described as of mixed race descent; it seeks to amplify and describe what is meant to be contemporary practitioner in social work in England. More specifically, it considers social work as a statutorily regulated profession with case study example of working through newly qualified status; whilst illustrating the impact and means of politically driven regulation with set criteria for compliance, regulation and completion of that role.

It narrates contradictions that compliance with externally driven performance criteria pose to a practitioner; who in seeking to integrate Black Feminist activist theory as an approach to work done in a UK context in 2015/16 begins to unpack what that means.

In so doing it highlights contemporary professional identity and the constraints this can pose to work with young people.

It maintains that a Black Feminist stance including 'Talking Truth to Racism' (hooks b.) within a UK European context is an essential integral element to social work in Europe if European social work is to maintain its relevance.

Panel 6: Gendering Migration Experiences #2

Kajal Nisha Patel: Woven Spirit: Documenting British South Asian Women and the Interplay between Power, Dreams and Struggle

Innumerable complexities exist, relating to what Amrit Wilson terms ‘...the past, the peasant past, the tribal past and the colonial past each with its own particular prescriptions for the woman’s role, constantly intruding on the present’.

This paper presents a series of commissioned films, by artist Kajal Nisha Patel about British South Asian women living and working in the East Midlands; She focuses on the first mass migration arriving in the late 1960s onwards. The work is an intimate view of women’s lives within the traditional bounds of Asian culture. Their stories are connected through a
shared history of working at Mansfield Hosiery Mills, Loughborough and the protests of October 1972, in which 500 Asian workers were involved in industrial strike action.

For these women, working life usually consisted of full-time employment, alongside domestic life as a housewife, mother and daughter-in-law. The role of for an Asian woman up until recently has been shaped by traditional Indian values mainly formed around the patriarchy. Her role in this context has typically been one of servitude and conformance. Through this series, Kajal intends to contrast a dual struggle as women fought for equal pay at work and personal freedom within the domestic space. Whilst at home women were largely expected to uphold domestic traditions and maintain family honour; at work emancipation was realised through camaraderie and friendship.

Kajal’s own experience as a second-generation British South Asian woman typifies the continual reconciling of conflict between inherited gender roles and shifting cultural values. Her work is influenced by her family heritage and through living within Leicester’s Asian community. She aims to draw attention to the difficulties her mother’s generation faced as they negotiated traditional values against their domestic and working roles in a new country.


**Amandine Gay: The Depoliticisation of Transracial Adoption**

In European medias and public opinion, transracial and international adoption is a highly depoliticized subject. Even in mainstream feminist and queer circles, when gay or trans* adoptions are debated, the social, racial and economic dimensions at stakes are rarely if ever tackled. What is more surprising is that European antiracist and Black Feminist circles have also overlooked this issue. Therefore, this communication aims at explaining why it is high time to remedy to this situation.

The first misconception about transracial adoption results from the erasure of this phenomenon from the field of forced migrations. Yet, the main difference between the four groups bound by international and interracial adoption, is that in contrast to adoptees of colour (who do not choose to be sent away in white families), states, private adoption agencies and
adoptive parents fully exercise their agency. Secondly, comes the erasure of international power struggles. Yet again, the commodification of racialized children adopted internationally reflects economic (the cost of an adoption abroad ranges from 10 to 30 000 €) and political inequalities between the global South and the global North. Finally, as France’s example will show, countries where international and transracial adoptions are the highest are (post)-colonial empires. France’s history of social engineering will be used as a tool to understand the colonial continuum at stakes in the transracial and international adoption process.

This communication’s objective is to raise awareness on the permanence of assimilationist discourses and practices towards poor children of color. Furthermore, it aims at deconstructing a phenomenon that can no longer be prohibited but must be studied and addressed better if we want to be able to regulate it and shift the narrative from «the right to children» to children’s rights.

**Geetha Marcus: The Intersecting Invisible Experiences of Gypsy/Traveller Girls in Scotland**

There has long been interest both politically and theoretically in exploring the complex relations between identity, hierarchical power and subordination. Intersectional approaches to social locations have stressed the interdependence between different kinds of divisions as well as the tensions and contradictions within and across these social categories. In this paper, I will argue that traditional unidimensional approaches to investigating experiences of oppression and subordination, particularly within marginalized communities, are inadequate. Critically exploring the complexity of such issues through a single lens – race, gender or class, for example, is likely to produce simplistic and skewed findings. Intersectionality is not just good research practice or a necessary heuristic device for understanding issues of power and inequality, but is increasingly viewed as a research paradigm in its own right. Drawing on the work of several key proponents of this methodological approach (Anthias, 2013; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006), I propose that an intersectional framework is ideally placed to critically explore such experiences, using empirical examples from a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews.
with Scottish Gypsy/Traveller girls. Their stories are highlighted and juxtaposed alongside the general problems encountered by Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland and reveal an intricate, convoluted narrative. The paper also problematizes what it means to be ‘white’, and to be a ‘white woman’ living within ‘simultaneously interlocking oppressions’ that collectively serve to marginalise and silence lives (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Combahee River Collective, 1977; hooks, 1981). Equally, discrepancies in levels of empowerment, public participation, media representations and respect for ethnicity are experienced at these intersections.

LUNCH

Afternoon Panels and Roundtable Discussions

Panel 7: Telling Black Women’s Stories

Claire Heuchan: As A Blackwoman: Poetry and the Politics of Identity in Scotland

This paper explores work that contributes to the visibility of Black women in a Scottish context – specifically, the poetry of Maud Sulter and Jackie Kay. Black feminism is typically perceived to be a North American development within the feminist movement. Although Black women are not ‘visible’ within the dominant culture, the perceived canon of Black feminist texts is an Americentric body. By analysing culturally significant materials, which address the lived experience of Black women in Scotland, I aim to highlight the importance of work that is distinctly Scottish and Black feminist.

Using a combination of Black feminist literary criticism (Christian, Smith, et. al) and intersectional theory (hooks, Crenshaw, Hill Collins, et. al), I will examine the significance of Black women’s poetry in establishing a narrative for Black women in Scotland. Both Sulter and Kay highlight the plurality of Black womanhood in contemporary Scottish society, demonstrating that there are multiple ways
to be a Black woman and validating the multiplicity of Black identity.

These poems challenge racism in a predominantly white society, demonstrate the inextricable connection between identities of race and sex, and are conscious of the insular, socially conservative leanings of Scottish society. Through critically examining the work of Sulter and Kay, I will explore the significance of their work in developing a Scottish context both for Black womanhood and Black feminism.

**Jennifer Ndidi Iroh and Njideka Stephanie Iroh: Queer Black Feminist Her*storytelling**

Our work explores the necessity of Black queer community spaces, in order to create and reflect archives of embodied knowledge.

Black queer feminist perspectives are central in our her*stories, but often systematically overlooked. How do we document Black queer her*stories as part of the decolonial documentation of Black resistance?

When we examine the notion of decolonisation we must simultaneously view the dream of the coloniser and what Black people are taught about themselves. This is inevitably connected to the physical, psychological and emotional violence of colonisation and enslavement. This knowledge is imprinted in our physical bodies. When we research and are dependent on colonial tools we are faced with the challenge of un-learning colonial knowledge whilst experiencing its very violence. From this starting point we seek safe spaces of self-love, radical love and community, in order to share oral his_here*story and empower others and ourselves. We are creating archives as mobile spaces in art, performance and storytelling: archives including but not limited to academic spaces, utilising technology and barrier-free access to knowledge documentation.

The Black Her*Stories Project utilises the medium of film to highlight and pass on queer Black feminist stories. The selected films depict stories by and about Black LGBTQ people bringing them to the cinema screen and thus creating decolonial and feminist resistance.
From our experiences in activist and academic fields, Black (queer) spaces of exchange form a powerful basis for knowledge production and documentation.

Our current working processes for presentation: The Black Her*Stories Project - Vienna’s first queer Black feminist film festival, Bodies of Knowledge – Multiplying Marginalised Subjectivities of Utopia through Art and Storytelling and put poetic pressure on the wound (spoken word and oral her*story).

Lea Hülsen: Representations of Agency and Liminality in the Work of Black Female Caribbean Intellectuals

My Project discusses texts written by black female Caribbean intellectuals such as Beryl Gilroy, Claudia Jones and Sylvia Wynter and their contribution to cultural and political discourses of the black, anglophone diaspora ranging from the beginning of 1950s to early 2000s. To analyse their texts I use a comparative and intersectional approach. My corpus comprises a variety of genres (for example essays, novels and poems) and draws on theoretical frameworks from post- and decolonial studies, Black Feminism and Border Studies. My project focuses not only on their individual but also on their collective participation in the transnational discourse of the anglophone transatlantic space. Emanating from their marginalisation as black female colonial subjects, their work criticises social structures, norms and beliefs in society. Jones’ essay “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman” (1949) sets the tone in which all four intellectuals critically engage with what came to be known as post- and decolonial studies. I analyse the possible circulation of knowledge between these scholars and examine to what extent this is traceable in hindsight.

Within post/de-colonial discourses, black women writers are often exclusively associated with questions of marginality and periphery. I argue that their work should be considered on their own terms – that is, without comparing them to a non-black, non-female discourse – and needs to be discussed on a global scale, reflecting the wide range of topics they address. They not only reject colonial structures, but also address gender-specific conflicts. A look at the reception of female Afro-Caribbean intellectuals in academia today suggests that they are non-existent and reveals how they only appear at the margins. There are a few studies on Jones and
Wynter; Carole Boyce Davies published two books about Claudia Jones (Beyond Containment and Left of Karl Marx) and Katherine McKittrick wrote about Sylvia Wynter (Demonic Grounds and Sylvia Wynter). For Beryl Gilroy, however, no major academic texts are available, except from a few essays. In this context my dissertation functions as a ‘recuperative act’, which integrates their work into an anglophone cultural history and into academia. I aim to fill this gendered gap, examine its particularities and identify possible reasons for it.

Panel 8: Self Care as Political Warfare

Iris Rajanayagam and Mai Zeidani Yufanyi: White Men Sleep Best
In many ways Germany suffers from the same racism the rest of Europe does, white supremacy on the rise, police brutality and systematic and systemic discrimination on various levels. But its location, its history and its powerful role in Europe today create a situation which slightly changes the rules of the game, deepens the syndromes and stiffens movements.

Germany’s policy of deliberate amnesia regarding it’s colonial past and its denial and unwillingness to accept that it is a society shaped by century-long and diverse migration\(^2\), challenges its ability of sincerely processing and dealing with racist acts and thoughts. Hegemonic imagery of the “Bio-German\(^3\)” and the notions of identity and belonging that come with it are constantly re-enacted and affirmed by both society and its institutions.

The consequent atmosphere is one of an intensive and constant struggle against strong windmills for each and every Black Person and Person of Colour in Germany. This circumstance is especially detrimental to Black Women and Women of Colour (WoC) due to the multi-layered, intersectional discrimination they face.

Not surprising, yet troubling is the effect racism has on Black Women and WoC in German society. A context of everyday experiences of dehumanization, othering and the permanent feeling of not belonging can lead to serious health issues; a recent definition of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder\(^4\) includes the damage resulting in the constant fight against
and dealing with racist micro aggressions. This is definitely also true for the Black Women and WoC in the German context.

We would like to discuss the role of mental-health and body wellbeing of Black Women and WoC and the importance of body sovereignty and acknowledgement and the recognition of the significance mental strength has to the struggle of feminisms of Colour in postcolonial Germany.

1 “Nobody sleeps better than white people”, “Lack of sleep has been linked to health problems including obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke, and premature death. It also increases the risk of car accidents and medical errors.” NPR: Want To Get A Great Night’s Sleep? Head To South Dakota. Angus Chen. February 19, 2016

2 It was only in 2005 that Germany official acknowledge that it was a migration society

3 The idea of German identity invariably coinciding with whiteness


Joanne Wilson: Space to Speak: The Invisibility and Erasure of African-Caribbean British in Discourses of Equality

This paper will examine the question of identity and belonging by exploring African-Caribbean British women’s agency to speak of histories of childhood sexual abuse Where recent studies have begun to recognise the role of culture in women’s experiences of sexual violence that focus has tended to be informed from an African-American perspective (Crenshaw, 1991). Many similarities exist between the lived experiences of African-Caribbean British (ACB) and African-American (AA) communities, especially in regard to our slave heritages and the continuation of racial oppression within our everyday lives within the West. There are, however, key experiential differences in how the structural, societal and individual practices of racial exclusions directed at ACB and AA communities, and these are invisibilised in approaches that view them as homogeneous.

Similarly, differences exist in the ways that African-Caribbean women and men experience and are impacted by racism in the UK. Yet to date it tends to be the African-Caribbean male viewpoint that is thrust to the fore, not that of his mother, sister, and daughter. Consequently, many of the public
responses to racial inequality have favoured the concerns of the African-Caribbean man, and thus the voices of ACB women are erased.

Drawing from an empirical project on ACB women survivors of childhood sexual abuse, this paper addresses how the silencing of ACB women survivors works across these three aspects of their identity: as African-Caribbean British (as apart from African-American); as ACB women (as apart from ACB men); and as survivors of childhood sexual abuse. As such, ACB women survivors ‘space to speak’ and therefore agency is informed by these three aspects of erasure impacting and complicating notions of belonging and citizenship.

1 See PhD Thesis, J. Wilson, (2016), Sour Milk: African Caribbean British Women’s Experiences of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Existing within the liminal spaces between Race and Gender

Claudia Garcia-Rojas: (Un)Disciplined Desires: Women of Colour Feminism as a Disruptive to White Affect Studies

In this essay, I demonstrate how women of colour feminism predates and disrupts dominant dialogues in the field of White Affect Studies. I introduce the concept of white affect studies as an arena of inquiry that draws from Western-European theories and literatures that architects a socio-political structure of affect that positions white affects as universal, concrete and true. Scholars contributing to the field of white affect studies posit theories of affect, embodiment, subjectivity, phenomenology, violence, war, sexuality, pleasure, and more, while disregarding the theoretical contributions made by women of colour feminism in thinking through these notions and social issues. This is done by engaging in a citational practice that results in an epistemic erasure of feminist of colour thought. The voices of women of colour feminists are thus disqualified, and their theoretical contributions are not acknowledged as significant or relevant in conceptualizing affect, affective economies, and the social. By turning to the writings of women of colour feminists, I
illustrate how their theories on embodiment, subjectivity, and social structures predate the institutionalization of white affect studies. Feminists of colour from the past and present have and continue to theorize through a language of self that illuminates their experiences as subjects embedded within matrices of violence, power, and pleasure.

Audre Lorde, Natalie Martinez, and Maya Chinchilla write about the ways in which lesbian and queer women of colour institute different affects that counter dominant structures of emotion, systems of power, and heterosexual modes of being. In developing conceptual methodologies, Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla are able to weave into the dominant discursive logic a language of self that both introduces new queer subjectivities, while reinterpreting existing forms of thought, thereby contesting mainstream economies of white affects, of white affect studies. It is through a language of self that Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla develop an ethic of survival that counter-mobilizes against white hegemonic apparatuses.


**Kavita Maya: The Spiritual is Political: A Black Feminist Analysis of Contemporary Integrative Spirituality**

Recent scholarship on contemporary spirituality and on women’s non-institutional religious identification has suggested that the term ‘alternative spirituality’ obscures the ways in which countercultural spiritual practices and ideas have increasingly influenced the socio-cultural mainstream over the past twenty years, and in turn have been shaped by the neoliberal ideology of late capitalism. This paper argues that although hegemonic representations of countercultural or ‘integrative’ spirituality are often differentiated from and defined in opposition to politics, they in fact rely on (post)colonial, racialised discourses of ethnicity and cultural origin which universalise a white, Eurocentric worldview, continually excluding and exoticising women of colour in Europe. Presenting a case study from my doctoral research on the contemporary UK-based Goddess movement, one such example is the desire among some spiritual feminists to rediscover the ‘indigenous’ Celtic roots of white, European
women, while at the same time drawing extensively on Orientalist discourses in their spiritual practice. I argue that depoliticised representations of spirituality adopted by the mainstream market, which predominantly emphasise individualism and personal wellbeing, conceal essentialist ideologies of race and gender, marginalising political approaches to spirituality, which celebrates collectivism and the struggle against inequalities. I recount representations of spirituality in black feminist thought as a way of countering and re-conceptualising the binary opposition between spirituality and politics.

Panel 9: Black Feminist Activism and Resistance

Diane Watt and Adele Jones: Building Black Feminist and Womanist Spaces

Abasindi is a Zulu word meaning ‘Survivors’. The members of the Co-operative chose this name as a tribute to the strength, resilience and competence of Black women in particularly those in Africa and the Caribbean that were actively involved in struggles against the dehumanizing and oppressive forces of apartheid and neo-colonialism. As discussed in the book, Catching Hell and Doing Well, (Watt and Jones 2015), this paper sets out the social and political context which gave rise to the Abasindi Cooperative in Moss Side, Manchester. The decision to establish the organisation in 1980 was based on the experiences of women from the 1960s onwards most of whom were the daughters of post-War migrants. The establishment of the Co-op also reflects a continuation of Black women’s activism as in the work of Amy Jacques Garvey and Una Marson. Amy Ashwood Garvey also chaired the session on race at the 1945 Pan-African Congress, which was held in Manchester at the Chorlton Town Hall. The aims and objectives of the Co-operative were to provide a social supportive base for Black women, a community resource centre, supplementary and cultural educational facilities for Black children and young people. Although scholarship is seldom attributed to Black women artists and political activist, ultimately Abasindi provided a space and opportunity for women to begin to determine and re-define their conditions as in the development of its cultural activities. The Abasindi drumming and dance group was primarily established to create an opportunity for Black women and young people to rediscover the value of their own culture within the African diaspora and to develop the creativity of
its members. For women and children faced with deportation it was a sanctuary and a space in which to have their voices heard.

Andrea Tara-Chand: Implications of the ‘War on Terror’ for Muslim Women in Britain: Narratives of Resistance and Resilience

Public policy and public discourse have generated considerable ‘noise’ around the issue of terrorism and counter-terrorism. However, these debates have been accompanied by a deafening silence on the gendered and racialized issue of the (in)security experienced by Muslim women. This paper seeks to break the silence by exposing Muslim women’s experiences of fear, resistance and resilience. Based on the findings of an ethnographic study conducted in 2013 the paper will illustrate the importance of the theoretical frames of every-day resistance and the ‘third space’ to give voice to women’s non-public resistances.

The paper will argue that popular public discourse portrays Muslim women in negative gendered terms as silent victims who have also come to symbolise a threat to Western ideology and way of life. Findings from the research study on which this paper is predicated indicate that South Asian Muslim women are far from how they are too often represented – as passive recipients of gender and faith oppression. Women’s resistances will be explored in their struggles to formulate identity in the binary of the Muslim OR secular identities prescribed for them. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the ‘third space’ offers the possibility to imagine women’s appropriation and translation of their historic cultural traditions through discourse. These theoretical constructs enable a subtle understanding of women’s capacity to shift their identity positions from the ones ascribed to them to self-determined identities of who they are.

The concept of the discursive ‘third space’ has been utilised to name women’s new ‘hybrid’ identity positions; neither Muslim, nor British, nor a combination of the two enabling the creation of new positions that challenge existing identity formulations.
Like African American women before them, women of colour in Europe are breaking the mirrors they have been forced to look into. At this different historical moment, women of colour appear to have a voice, but lack a distinctive identity to challenge this illusion of change and collectively construct a movement, which is able to operate within race, class, gender and sexuality frameworks and achieve a long-lasting visibility. Shared stories and spirituality can be powerful weapons in overcoming race and gender oppressions, and they can be illustrated through technologies which previous generations did not have access to. By proposing the use of technology to take action and create impact by allowing what shouldn’t be seen – women of colour’s lived experiences of visualisation through hypervisibility – to be seen, new methods of social justice and activism can be realised and used for imagining the futures of European Black feminism and Womanism. Online communities and movements can be powerful yet must be conceptualised in order to influence real change in offline societies and play a critical role in mediating the interests at stake at government level. There should be an imperative to adopt a supportive, multi- and trans-cultural approach to ensure the diversity of social media “users” in all their complexity – including emerging social media (il)literacy and its relation to social media legibility are not dismissed. For when an enriched and expanded tapestry of experiences is to be used as the framework to reconstruct existing power structures and the visualisation of women of colour in Europe, a single thread does not make a weave.
Generous Support
Has Been Provided By:

The British
Sociological Association
Race & Ethnicity
Study Group

The European Consortium for Political Research
Standing Group on Gender & Politics

Additional support from:
The UK & Ireland
Feminist & Women’s
Studies Association