

Chapter 2: The Emergence of Black British Political Filmmaking and its Broken Relationship with Social Realism.

Clive James Nwonka

January, 2012

This chapter sets out to examine the ways in which 20th century immigration, especially in the post-Second World War period and subsequent race struggles influenced the burgeoning socio-political character of ethnic minority filmmaking in Britain. An examination is conducted of the ways in which black filmmaking was characterised by its politicized account of British life and how multiculturalism via a New Labour discourse depoliticized this film content. This chapter seeks to examine these and related developments up until the beginning of the 21st century.

Several plausible excuses can be proposed to explain the contemporary depoliticization of black British filmmaking, and the inability of the British film industry to create a lasting black British film culture with a fidelity to the realities of 21st century Britain, being a lack of sufficient funding, an absence of historical knowledge and racial awareness, the by-products of state multiculturalism, and the persistence of unequal access for certain sections of British society.

The gradual demise of the British Empire and the effects of World War Two coincided with the first major influx of immigrants from the Caribbean, Indian and later, African subcontinent. As a result of the human and economic losses during the Second World War, the British government actively encouraged mass immigration from the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth to fill shortages in the labour market. The 1948 British Nationality Act provided British citizenship to all people of the Commonwealth countries, including full rights of entry and residency in the UK.²²

The *Empire Windrush* arrived at Tilbury on 22 June 1948, carrying 493 passengers from Jamaica, these passengers being the first large group of West Indian immigrants to the UK after the Second World War. While the largest proportion of this African-Caribbean immigration (and ones to follow) in the UK were of Jamaican origin, other nations such as Trinidad and Tobago,

Saint Kitts and Nevis, Barbados, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, Dominica settled in London, and to a lesser extent and Birmingham.

Though Afro-Caribbeans were invited into Britain via immigration campaigns created by successive British governments, the new arrivals were to endure prejudice, discrimination and extreme racism from white Britain.²² This experience was to signify African-Caribbeans' antagonistic relations with the wider British Society. As a result, while there was work available in post-war Britain in industries such as British Rail, London Transport and the National Health Service, early immigrants found private employment and housing denied to them on the basis of ethnicity. Trade unions, seeing immigrants as a threat to their own employment security would refuse African-Caribbean workers help and counsels and pubs, clubs, and churches would bar black people from entering. As housing was in short supply following the wartime bombing, this led to some of the initial conflicts with the present white community. This continued into the 1950s, and riots erupted in other cities including Birmingham and Nottingham.²² In 1958, under the influence of the racism and intolerance incited by explicitly anti-immigration movements including Oswald Mosley's Union Movement, and the White Defence League, violent attacks in the West London area of Notting Hill by white 'Teddy Boy' youths led to the creation of the annual Notting Hill Carnival. This change in the ethnic composition and the conflicts it generated in Britain became the catalyst for the socio-political implications that were to follow in British cinema.

Small shifts began to appear in relation to black cinematic representation. *Pool of London* (Basil Dearden, 1951) became one of the earliest films in British cinema to effectively bring to screen the issue of prevailing racial intolerance and prejudice. In this film, Johnny, a black merchant seaman, becomes involved in an interracial relationship against the backdrop of docklands criminality. While this was the first instance of an interracial relationship in British film, race featured as an issue, as opposed to the *theme* in the context of an otherwise non-racial narrative. Bodily contact between the lovers is kept at a minimum and anything further would have been seen as breaking social taboos. It was not until the race riots in Notting Hill in 1958 that issues concerning race relations became core themes in black British filmmaking, with

Sapphire (Basil Dearden, 1959) and later *Flame in the Streets* (Roy Barker, 1961) belonging to this cycle. 5

Flame in the Streets is distinctive in terms of the early films presenting ethnic minority characters in the way it links the personal with the political in a singular narrative, interweaving both class and race. In this narrative, a man succeeds in introducing his work colleagues to the idea that a black co-worker can occupy a management role despite the disquiet that his difference has generated, while displaying a benevolent attitude towards his daughters relationship with a black man in the face of abhorrence from his wife. In marrying trade unionism with notions of equality that extend to ethnic minorities, the idea of a collectivized working class that, represented in the anti-racist character of Jacko, can transcend racial difference is given a filmic treatment for the first time in British Cinema.

These films came to prominence during the British New Wave period, however they have historically been detached from this movement, with the films of Anderson, Richardson and Reisz deemed as more sophisticated, less homespun and of a greater aesthetic quality. Films like *Sapphire*, *Victim* (Basil Derden 1961) and *A Place to Go* (Basil Derden, 1963) preceded and paralleled the work of the 'angry young men', a synonym for the British New Wave films that had been adapted from plays written by young playwrights who shaped their narratives around working class characters. However, in clearly demonstrating the courage to deal with race, these films displayed greater bravery and fidelity to the realities of immigrant life and a political awareness than their supposedly more innovative, educated and talented colleagues. 16

Sapphire tells the story of a young pregnant student who has been the victim of a vicious murder, with her white boyfriend being the prime suspect. As the police investigation deepens, the police conclude that the murder was racially motivated, and it is only when the victim's brother comes into direct contact with the family of the accused that the pathological hatred that his sister holds for black people is exposed and through her vitriolic tirade of racial abuse directed at him, the murderer is incriminated. However, in the course of the British New Wave, these filmic investigations into the prevalent racial tensions are thin, and this reluctance of the British New

Wave films to confront the existing racial conflict of the period is no more evident than in *Saturday Night Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960) where minority ethnic issues are invisible, despite these themes being a feature of the book.¹²

By 1961, over ten years after the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury and despite the British government undertaking systemic measures to greatly reduce immigration (until the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, all Commonwealth citizens could enter and stay in the United Kingdom without any restriction) approximately 172,000 people had immigrated from the West Indies, with a further 83,000 people from the Commonwealth settling in the UK between 1968 and 1975.²² While the majority of blacks found residence in the run down inner cities of London, Birmingham and Manchester, significant communities also settled in other areas, such as Bradford, Nottingham, Coventry, Luton, Leicester, Bristol, Leeds, Huddersfield, Sheffield, Liverpool and Cardiff, in particular areas like Brixton, Harlesden, Stonebridge, Tottenham, Dalston, Lewisham, and Peckham in London, West Bowling and Heaton in Bradford, Chapeltown in Leeds, St. Pauls in Bristol, Handsworth and Aston in Birmingham and Moss Side in Manchester.²² Asian immigration extended to the old mill industry towns of Salford, Burnley, Blackburn and Bolton, where the industry was in decline, jobs for new arrivals were scarce and social integration non existent, creating a group density effect, in which new arrivals grouped together in an act of solidarity and protection from the prejudice of the citizens of the host nation, who felt a sense of invasion.

By the early 1970's, television had become the dominant medium for representing British race relations, predominantly in the shape of sociological documentaries investigating the numerous aspects of apparent immigrant existence. However, as the commissioners, producers and practitioners involved in devising and making these programs were all white, these programmes tended to pathologise and particularize the ethnic minority experience, rather than providing insight, education and new perspectives on the subjects.² Such, it took over 20 years for the British film establishment to recognize the potential in ethnic minority filmmaking, when *Pressure* (Horace Ove, 1974) became the first film by a black director to be fully financed by the BFI.² Arguably the most important filmmaker to lead the way in depicting black culture, Trinidadian born Ove's film tells the story of a black teenager Tony, torn between the Trinidadian

roots of his immigrant family and his own British identity.

In the film, Tony, young black and educated, struggles to assimilate into mainstream British society despite his credentials. His unemployment directs him to his brother's politicised approach to black identity, and while not holistically subscribing to this discourse, his marginalisation (in the shape of police brutality and estrangement from his white friends) exposes him to the reality of British life for young black men and his adherence to a more politicized solution. With themes similar to that of *Babylon* (Franco Russo, 1980) *Pressure* draws on the controversial and oppressive 'suspicion' laws that allowed the Metropolitan Police to target and harass innocent young black males in urban areas of London, and brings to the screen the deeply embedded racism of much of the surrounding white community in London. 10

Made just two years after *Pressure*, *Black Joy* (Anthony Simmons, 1976) was another significant point for black filmmaking in Britain, with the film being the first to feature an all black cast. And while not overtly political at first glance, the film in the main depicts its troubled characters as making the best of their lives within an existing oppressive socio-political framework as opposed to seeking an alternative existence. This stance can be interpreted as an implicit political statement in itself. And while not without fault, *Black Joy* made race the central concern of the film and its location in Brixton had considerable allure as it was set in one of the few districts that retained the kind of working class culture director Simmons recalled from his childhood, albeit an Afro Caribbean as opposed to a Jewish one. 10

Throughout the late 1960's and 1970's, white Britain had continued to argue fiercely over the British political attitudes towards race, against a background of complete silence from those most directly affected by existing and forthcoming political discourses in relation to the issue. These policies involved on the one hand, the redrafting of the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1972, which stated only holders of work permits, or people with parents or grandparents born in the UK could gain entry into Britain in an attempt to significantly reduce immigration from Commonwealth countries and on the other the Race Relations Act of 1976 and policies specifically designed to recognise and celebrate minority cultures and containment of anti-racist politics in the UK.²² However, it was not until the early 1980's that Britain's ethnic minority

communities themselves would finally find a voice that could be heard. It can be argued that this voice was one that found resonance in reaction to the existing racism in Britain, as opposed to through a multicultural practice that was put in place to ameliorate the very racism that oppressed them.¹³ This racism that emerged in 1970's Britain was constructed through a rejection of immigration, built on the momentum captured by Enoch Powell in his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' on 20 April 1968 in which he warned of what he believed would be the consequences of continued unregulated immigration to Britain. Conservative Leader Edward Heath sacked Powell from his Shadow Cabinet the following day, and although by the late 1970's Powell was no longer a Conservative MP, his influence shadowed over the party, covering all who shared with his views on immigration in the form of the infamous Monday Club.¹³ Although no member of parliament was an active member of this collective, its fierce influence amongst the backbenches of the Tory party meant that whatever means the government adopted to regulate immigration into the UK were labelled insufficient by the collective's extreme right wing expectations.¹³ Concurrently, rising neo fascist organisations like the National Front were demanding all people of non white skin colour should be forcefully removed from Britain, but having yet to be elected and in an effort to seduce disillusioned liberals, Tory policy simply could not be that draconian. The Tory manifesto of 1979 stated that:

We will help those immigrants who genuinely wish to leave this country, but there can be no question of compulsory repatriation'.¹³

However, some years later, a now in power Margaret Thatcher stated:

"People are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people of a different culture. The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and has done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, then people are going to be rather hostile to those coming in. We are a British nation, with British characteristics. Every country can take some minorities, and in many ways they add a richness and variety to this country. But the moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened."¹³

Thus, the immigration debate was never actually about immigration per se, it was in fact about race and identity. This coupled with the default rhetoric that the UK was overcrowded and could hold no more immigrants, a notion utterly disconnected from reality – more people emigrated during the 1970s and 1980's than were permitted entry, thus the UK population remained static. It was 55.9 million in 1971 and 56.4 million in 1981.¹³

In this racialised climate, there were very few opportunities for ethnic minorities, particularly the 550,000 immigrants of West Indian heritage, to establish careers. Generally, to be black was to be unemployed or underemployed, to live in substandard accommodation in inner city council housing and to attend the very worst, oversubscribed and underperforming state schools. The growing number of Asians that were paradoxically succeeding in Thatcher's climate of narcissistic entrepreneurialism were denied recognition for their efforts and remained on the periphery of society. During state recession, ethnic minorities were hit the hardest, with unemployment amongst black people up to 82.5% in February 1981¹³. To be young and black also meant living with the perpetual risk of arrest on the slightest pretext and the frightening prospect of white racism, either civic or systemic. A Home Office study at the time concluded that while blacks were 36 times more likely to suffer racism than whites, the police had since failed to address this fact with any genuine conviction.²²

The first demonstration of change was a campaign called *Scrap Sus*, which came to prominence in then late 1970s. The metropolitan police had been maximising the 1834 Vagrancy act, which effectively anointed omnipotence to them in allowing them to stop and search civilians on the mere suspicion that they may be planning criminal activity. In 1978, 3,800 were arrested on this pretext, the vast majority being black.¹³ The campaign against this legalised practice became so forceful that one of the very first legislations introduced by the incoming Tory party was to repeal the Vagrancy Act, to the dismay of the Monday Club backbenchers. This triumph introduced blacks to the idea that they no longer had to withstand police harassment and active mobilisation could lead to a degree of social change.

Black British culture had been shown before on the cinema screen before *Babylon*. *Black Joy* featured an all black cast, and was filmed on the streets of Brixton. But, like *Black Joy*, *Babylon* was the work of a white director, Franco Russo. The film follows a group of young black reggae sound system artists in reacting with defiance and retribution to the everyday racism they encounter. Their resistance is also articulated through their politicised music, in particular, in the final scene where they barricade themselves in a warehouse to prevent a police raid. What is significant is that the original *Babylon* script, written by Martin Stellman was initially commissioned as a *Play for Today*, until the BBC refrained from producing it on the grounds that

their treatment of the subject of racial discrimination was potentially inflammatory within the existing political climate.¹⁰

It was then financed by Mamoun Hassan at the National Film Financing Corporation, primarily backing the film with £297, 525, with an additional contribution of £16,537.50. A deal was then negotiated by producer Gavrik Losey with Chrysalis records to provide further funds in exchange for 8.5% stake in the equity of the film, with Chrysalis committing an initial £30,000, bringing the total budget to £375,000, being the only film financed by the NFFC that year.¹⁰

What was also significant about the films funding is that Hassan had agreed to provide 83% of the funding for the film; under normal practice, the NFFC would provide just 30% of the films budget. The film was shot by the highly regarded cinematographer Chris Menges who, having previously shot *Kes* (Ken Loach, 1969) and *Black Jack*, continued with that very camerawork that lent *Kes* its social realist quality.

Babylon was controversially awarded an X certificate by the censor, James Freeman. His rationale was both patronising and pathologising; black youths would feel anger, resentment and further alienation from mainstream society. Through the realistic instances of institutional racism in the form of police brutality and racist abuse suffered at the hands of resentful neighbours depicted, they may see that retributive violence against whites was their only option available in withstanding racism. In effect, the certificate reduced the films exposure to members of the black community who potentially could be galvanised by the films message of defiance. This also indicated that the film establishment identified the poignancy, power, and threat the film posed to the status quo. The film made a total of £91, 204.26.¹⁰

Although *Babylon* set out to accurately tell the story of everyday racism within the narrative of South London black youth culture, the actual filmmakers were not black. This fact makes it difficult to talk about the film in terms of *black* British cinema. But the filmmakers clearly felt that they shared the views of the immigrants in the city that allowed them to transcend race. The final scene in where the police's attempt to close down the party is met by resistance was not simply a metaphor; it was a call to arms to repel state oppression.

Burning an Illusion (1981) can be considered as deriving from *Babylon*, although its narrative trajectory shares a greater co-relation with *Pressure*. In this film, a young girl rejects aspirations of assimilating into a comfortable bourgeois existence and becomes absorbed in black politics after her black boyfriend is sentenced to prison for reacting violently to police brutality. What was being articulated through this narrative and others belonging to this cycle is that assimilation into mainstream British society for ethnic minorities is futile within the existing racially oppressive climate, and a politicised approach to black identity is the only way to effectively bring forward social change, although this will result in a life on the periphery.

On six occasions in less than 5 years up to September 1980 officers of the special patrol group SPG poured into Brixton, setting up road blocks and making early morning raids and random street checks without consulting local liaison groups or elected representatives or even informing local police before dispatching officers in. Sooner or later, some confrontation between the police and local black youths were inevitable.¹⁸

On 11 April 1981, one of the most notorious rioting in the history of the UK took place in Brixton, an area that became a synonym for marginalized black urban culture. The previous day, a crowd of 40 black youths rescued a black youth from a police car, bloodied from being involved in a fight. Believing he had been the victim of police brutality, a standoff proceeded, and forced police reinforcements to withdraw. This prompted an explosion of violence. In the 6 days prior, the police had launched Operation Swamp 81, where 10 squads of about 5-11 officers swarmed Brixton's streets every night between 2pm and 11pm for a week during which 120 plain clothed officers stopped 943 people, arresting 118 of them. Shops were smashed and looted, cars burned and bricks and petrol bombs thrown. 279 police officers injured, 145 buildings were damaged, and 82 arrests were made.¹³ Later in the same year, further unrest occurred in Handsworth, Birmingham, Bristol, Moss Side and Toxteth. The public inquiry led by Lord Scarman, published on 25 November 1981 declared that racial disadvantage was a simple but shameful fact of current British life.¹⁸

While Scarman's enquiry recognised the problem of disproportionate policing, it rejected any charges of institutional racism, blaming the riots on African Caribbean's supposed predisposition towards criminality, youth delinquency and single parent families. Unconsidered was the effects of the 1981 British Nationality Act that restricted the rights of the spouses (mostly the husbands)

of already immigrated families to settle in Britain.²² Government involvement should take form solely in implementing a multicultural solution to unemployment and substandard education. Previously, charges of racism were widely regarded as an unhelpful accusation – unjustifiably inflammatory and engineered as part of an underhanded strategy developed by ethnic minorities in competition for attention and government resources. However, Scarman's report became the genesis for a comprehensive, grounded political programme of accommodating cultural minority needs with the sole objective of neutralising aggressive anti-racist disquiet.²²

This process was implemented by the radical Labour administration of the Greater London Council between 1982 and its abolition, as a result of central government legislation in 1986. Led by a far left politician called Ken Livingstone, who was just 33 at the time and would later come to represent everything that Tony Blair loathed about the self destructive, and more importantly, the unelectable Labour left, Livingstone's equality agenda was ahead of its time.² Beyond mere expediency, the GLC took up demands for black representation in political decision - making and opened up a new phase of local democracy involving constituencies marginalized from mainstream party politics. At its cultural level, the GLC also inaugurated a new attitude to funding arts activities by regarding them as stand alone, cultural industries in their own right. Both these developments proved important for the burgeoning black independent film sector.² By essentializing black cultural initiatives either by direct subsidy or through training and development policies the GLC marked a break with the piecemeal and often patronizing 'ethnic arts'. In 1982, they sponsored a conference to re-evaluate black artists access to media production, where they were critically targeted by black artists because of the way they felt they underfunded their creative endeavors. More crucially, it seemed that they privileged white producers when representing black issues to the public.²

While many artists benefitted from funds generated by this, the notion of 'minority arts' angered many black artists afraid of being marginalised as problems to be nurtured and guided in British society. They challenged this idea of multiculturalism, which essentially collapsed separate artistic and cultural forms into one without real considerations for individual difference. What must be recognised is that multiculturalism was not demanded by ethnic minorities - what was desired was cultural recognition, equal access to the means of film production and wider representation in the industry. However, this represented an attempt to pacify potential artistic

attacks on the hegemonic forms of racism prevalent at the time. Thus, state multiculturalism proved to become the velvet glove over the iron fist of anti racist filmmaking, with multiculturalism's role being to negate all forms of racial thinking despite the overwhelming evidence.

Channel Four were also criticized for not taking greater strides to address black audiences through shows such as *Black on Black*, and *Eastern Eye*. There was a need for shows to be counter hegemonic, portraying a different picture of the black experience to ITV shows like *Love Thy Neighbour*, *Mind Your Language* and *Mixed Blessings*, which displayed racist stereotypes of black people in Britain. The GLC and Channel Four responded by setting aside funds for training black youth in their chosen mediums, with the objective to develop a film language that could address the black experience in Britain.²

Programmes devised specifically for black and ethnic minority filmmaking development emerged in the 1980s via Channel Four's regional workshops, with Sue Woodford placed as the first Commissioning Editor for multi-cultural programming. In the 1982 Channel Four launch brochure they declared that:

Channel Four will portray Britain as the multi-racial society it is, encouraging different ethnic groups to speak to us, entertain us, tell us how they perceive the world we share.

Sue Woodford continued by stating that:

Black communities in the UK are very angry and they have very tough things to say about British society and the way the system works. If black film is to be authentic and actually acceptable to a black audience then it must have black involvement in the divestment, the production, the casting and scripting, the editing and the receivership, that deals with issues at the forefront of the black community as opposed to the liberal white concerns over black identity and issues.⁹

On the back of this declaration, she set up training schemes and courses, the objective being this would generate a bigger production base in the future. Woodford saw this as an important component of her remit as she discovered that there existed a shortage of professionally trained black or Asian people working in television. In an effort to reverse the representation of ethnic

minorities in TV, this had to be achieved affirmatively through the creation of positions behind the camera on her programmes.⁹ Crucially, existing film organisations like Ceddo, Black Audio and Sankofa remained largely amateur and voluntary-run collectives, yet were identified as important locations for the implementation of Channel Four's demanding talent development objectives as they provided a direct link to the very ethnic minorities they were targeting.

In September 1985, police stopped an unemployed twenty four year old named Floyd Jarrett in a car in Tottenham, North London, wrongly believing that the car was stolen. They then came to his home on the Broadwater Farm Estate, looking for stolen property. His mother, Cynthia, who weighed 20st, was prepared to co-operate but an argument broke out and she was pushed, falling and dying of a heart attack. On Sunday 6th October her relatives led a peaceful protest march towards Tottenham police station. However, by 9pm it was clear that the area was on the verge of erupting. A police officer was later shot, and at around 10:15, PC Keith Blacklock was surrounded and stabbed to death. At this point, the Tory Party called for the restoration of the death penalty.¹³

While this riot did not weaken Tory party policy, those who wanted to improve the circumstances of Britain's ethnic minorities turned to more constructive methods. The Labour Party began to feel the presence of very determined black activists. Patricia Hewitt, who had become Neil Kinnocks Press Secretary in 1983 was lobbied by a small contingent of recently elected members, two being Sharon Atkin and Diane Abbott. They persuaded her that the way to get around the reluctance of black and Asian communities to engage in activities dominated by whites is to create separate groups for them - in effect, ethnicising them.¹³

By 1986, when films like *Territories* and *Passion of Remembrance* gained international acclaim, what was apparent was that a new film vernacular had been cultivated that shifted the narrative away from race relation discourses and into direct racial confrontation, with the objective of bringing to screen the racial antagonisms experienced by blacks in British society. The solidarity that came amongst blacks and Asians during the late seventies and eighties because of the racist policies, policing and marginalisation created a pressure that needed an outlet, which became a creative outlet.

By the late 1980's, immigration was no longer the political issue it had previously been. The collapse of the Soviet Union discredited the idea of any alternative to free market capitalism. Thus, the Tories were more concerned with maximising British prosperity in the global market and the threat to British sovereignty posed by the European Union. The Monday Club remained, but its influence was now minimal and the political class had now turned away from such overt expressions of hostility towards ethnic minorities, with the new Prime Minister John Major attempting to ensure at least one black Conservative MP would be elected in the next election. 13

A key policy that the outgoing Prime Minister pushed through that would leave a lasting legacy on the direction of the British film industry was the British Broadcasting Act of 1990. In particular, the financial stability afforded to Channel Four by its unique funding mechanism meant that it had no immediate concern over attracting a majority audience. It had the unique luxury of 10 years to establish itself with any programmes which it wished to provide because it was not rendered a commercial commodity. With the levy from the ITV companies removed, the reality that the Channel was not financially independent and now in direct competition with the BBC shifted its emphasis from creating controversial programming for minority Britain to that which allured mainstream Britain to the channel. This had particular ramifications for black filmmakers who had benefitted from nearly 10 years of financial support from the channel – diversity was no longer Channel Four's paramount concern.

However, despite these changes, black filmmakers continued to explore themes of race and exclusion in films such as *Young Soul Rebels* (1991, Issacs Julien). While there are numerous flaws in the script, in particular the attempts to amalgamate themes of race, sexuality and national identity, the film represented a continuation of the politicized films of the previous decade, and in using the characters relationship to provide the political commentary in the film, it demonstrated a stand alone artistic statement of how existing racist practices continue to arrest the development of ethnic minorities in Britain.

However, the desired image of Britain was of heritage and tranquillity, and there was still no vacancy for black filmmakers to effectively forge careers in the film industry, or even get their work to a wider audience. It was not heralded by the authorities as a triumph for British cinema, but to many, as anathema. The Foreign Office declined to fund black British films at the 1992

Carthage Film Festival specifically because they were deemed not likely to be representative of the kind of British cinema, and the British society that was privileged⁶. Thus, it was not until the mid to late 1990's when cultural institutions emphasis clearly shifted to 'open doors' for those specifically from ethnic minority backgrounds. They began to incorporate wider political aims into their own objectives, using terms like 'equality', 'diversity' and 'underprivileged', which mirrored the developing New Labour rhetoric.

Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, the default critique of multiculturalism had been that it is a corrosive of national identity. In Tony Blair's vision, an unintergrated diversity within Britain constituted a genuine threat to social cohesion unless it could be subsumed to a civic integration model defined through a nationalist perspective of a desirable and undesirable diversity.

Integration is not about culture or lifestyle. It is about values, it is about integrating at the point of shared, common unifying British values. It is non about what defines us a people, but as citizens"¹⁷

Within this rhetoric, multiculturalism needed to manifest itself as a form of liberal nationalism.¹ Thus, diversity, as a form of governmentality, is publically and officially aggrandised but only in methods and forms that define its self-interest within the government's self interest.

Once in power, New Labour commissioned an inquiry into the 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence. Leading politicians such as the Home Secretary Jack Straw accepted the findings of institutional racism that had been levelled at the Metropolitan Police. This inquiry informed the 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act which effectively required public authorities to adopt a much more structured and proactive stance against discrimination and race equality in the workplace.¹⁷

One of the major objectives for New Labour was the reversal of this trend of discrimination through social inclusion and opportunity, of which Tony Blair mainly chose to focus on education, employment and cultural activity, with culture in particular being seen as a viable means of regenerating urban areas and providing employment. The central belief by the government was that an apparent black monopoly on oppression could be corrected by artistic involvement. Providing cultural solutions to apparent cultural problems would, it was hoped, have the triple effect of dampening the voices of second generation migrants contesting state racism, increasing employment and reducing poverty and refocusing delinquent energies into

something tangible.¹² In wider society however, the poverty for the poorest sections that increased during the Conservative government of the 1980s and early 1990s continued unabated.

This represented a comprehensive, grounded political programme of accommodating cultural minority needs with the ultimate objective of neutralising aggressive anti-racist disquiet. This was in effect a benevolent and essentially paternalistic perspective, but this more permissive, liberal view prevailed. The Film Council formed in 1997, and this signified the New Labour government's intention to intervene in the organisation of film to a growing extent. Its main aims initially were to provide facilities and encourage participation on a wide community level, but the suggestion that they continued to regard cinema as serving particular political and societal functions was most clearly highlighted in the main locations and target groups of their increasing intervention, targeting the 'disadvantaged' of the inner cities. During this period, the recognised disadvantaged groups were identified as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. Whilst funding provision came to be set aside for the development of participation in all of these groups, it was towards ethnic minorities, specifically those from the most economically-deprived sections of society, where the majority of this new funding was directed.

¹²

The continuous exclusion of ethnic minorities became one of the most problematic issues for the Film Council during this time. This was manifested in their two main objectives: i) to develop ethnic talent, and ii) to change the culture of British film, essentially to target audiences from all backgrounds whom they wished to attract. To achieve more ethnic minority participation, British film had to broaden its appeal to these diverse sections of the population, namely the lower classes, many of whom were of an ethnic minority. Because the industry was considered as being the preserve of middle-class, white, middle-aged men and women, and further because the Arts Council were essentially the custodians of public revenue via its funding from the National Lottery, the Film Council viewed them as crucial in their plans, and ethnicized film organisations and collectives became the target for several development proposals.

Government authorities and New Labour began searching for ways to replace the outdated discourse of multiculturalism adopted by the GLC, manifested by compartmentalised and ethnicized arts funding with a more contemporary mode of identifying difference that had the

15

potential to be reconciled with a focus on cohesion. The change in emphasis also involved advocating moving away from the single group support to initiatives that encouraged these groups to become less singular and more amalgamated. As a result, the Arts Council partnered 21 film industry organisations in devising a Leadership in Diversity forum and created the first ever Equalities Charter for Film, and subsequently the Equalities Charter for Film Programme for Action. The Charter pledged six clear aims including:

- identifying the barriers to the industry
- encouraging communities to enjoy film culture
- welcoming employment from all communities
- encouraging all to remain in the industry
- developing and adopting equality and diversity policies and
- taking steps to increase on-screen diversity ¹²

From the late-1990s, the Film Council initiated a number of schemes to widen participation, remove barriers to participation, eradicate social exclusion and change the culture of British Film & TV, with social being racial, rather than economic, meaning that in line with the growing concern for ethnic inclusion in film, ethnic minorities alone became a focal point for film diversity attention. While this resulted in schemes and opportunities being made available for ethnic minorities from low-income areas, the white working class generally were not part of a wider development plan for the British film industry. Because this policy targeted the ethnic identity, as opposed to the economic status, from this position the class-discrimination argument, which suggests that people are excluded simply because they are, in fact, working class, can be legitimised. Essentially, it seemed to imply a dichotomous mode of thinking, whereby the experiences of blacks and of whites were regarded as mutually exclusive.

There existed a fundamental problem with this discourse. In explaining social exclusion in British film culture in relation to one's race, they conceptualised the issue around simple dichotomies, solely between whites and ethnic minorities. This distinction is found not only to be inaccurate, but also a false dichotomy; it presents a distinction cultivated to divide society into sections that are not entirely exclusive and quintessential - it assumes that exclusion is a cultural

rather than a class reality, and that it is holistically *race* that dominated peoples exclusion, rather than class.

The emergence of government interest in film from the late 1990s, and opportunities for financial assistance from the newly-established National Lottery, brought new demands on British films governing bodies, especially those who wished to compete for grants. Funding came to be offered as a quid pro quo exchange for proposals to remove barriers to participation and promote racial inclusion within British film culture. Increased competition for funding facilitated an extension of interdependency ties between film and their representative governing bodies.

The issue of racial inequality was neither raised nor deemed of paramount concern to dominant groups like the BBC at this time. So, up until the late 20th century this was most certainly not an issue of social or political importance. The competitive struggles for dominance between BBC Films & Film Four led to numerous unintended consequences, which influenced the general direction in which black British films developed. The BBC, for example, were forced to be competitive with other governing bodies on an economic level, as well as in terms of attracting commercially viable scripts. Thus, they also underwent a distinct internal morphing, as a result becoming much more diverse and focused on inclusion. Principally, these structural changes were implemented by coercion; the consequences of the wider social processes. However, the marginalised groups themselves had little power to label their own exclusion as a problem, and the power of groups acting on their behalf, if there were any, was comparatively small. Essentially, they had insufficient power chances to effectively challenge their marginalisation cinematically and, as such, it was not until the very end of the 20th century before the inequalities within British film industry gave substantial cause for concern.

The early 1990's saw a flourish of Hollywood films commissioned from African American filmmakers as the major American studios such as Universal Pictures and Warner Bros. recognized the commercial potential of this tradition of independent filmmaking practice. Amongst the well known films of this type are the series of 'ghetto' films depicting guns, crime, violence and black youth subculture exemplified by *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989), *New Jack City* (Mario Van Peebles, 1991) and *Boyz in the Hood* (John Singleton, 1992). Many of these films were dubbed 'crossover films' because they mix the cinematic techniques garnered in independent practice with mainstream generic values. 15

This was clearly the wider ambition for *Bullet Boy* (Saul Dibb, 2005) *Life and Lyrics* (Richard Laxton, 2006) and *Rollin' with the Nines* (Julian Gibley, 2006) with the former being dubbed 'a British Boys in the Hood'. However the difference is traced through the strand of African American independent filmmaking that adopts contemporary realist practices, using strategies that openly engage with the lived realities of urban life to depict the psychological, economical and social consequences of racism and marginalization on its characters. This is a distinct and crucial feature absent within its British offshoot. 15

In the light of social-reform policy throughout the early 2000's, film was seen as a vehicle through which the process of ethnic minority socialisation could be made more fluid, with cinema regarded as important in teaching young people in particular life skills and educational objectives. It is unsurprising that removing barriers to participation and preventing the social exclusion of particular groups from participating in film also became objectives for the BFI, ITV as well as the BBC and Channel Four. However, it is important to note that the objective was merely to include, rather than to develop ethnic minority talent in ways that would allow them to display cinematic talent in an effective, long term, and equal way.

A spate of knife and gun crimes amongst sections of the black working class youths in areas such as North West London, Hackney and parts of South London returned issues of black alienation to public consciousness, including several widely publicised murders on the St Raphael's and Stonebridge Park estates in Harlesden. 'Postcode wars', a term used frequently to describe conflicts between youths from particular districts of London was one of the assumed causes of the violence. Youth involvement in the drugs trade was also considered. As a result, the Met Police, somewhat controversially, set up Operation Trident to solely investigate crime within the black communities. This seemed to suggest that the police regarded black on black violence as a stand alone form of criminality, and as reflected in wider society, entitled to only a reduced focus.

As black-on-black violence soared, the British film world felt it was ready for something authentic and passionate, worthy and different. The middle class media approached the issue of

black crime and culture like it was an intellectual issue in abstract thought. The Arts Council seemed to have a desire for the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the urban world and all its connotations. If the semantics are to be considered, 'Urban' really meant crossover. The sociology, rather than the aesthetic, was now the focus. It could be assimilated, categorized, commercialised and made profitable. However, the choice of film was constantly congruent with the tastes of a middle class, educated audience looking for forms of entertainment that offered something different from the normal Hollywood fanfare or British heritage film.

The liberal media found this package irresistible. And with a mix of exotic admiration and racial fear, hailed these films as groundbreaking. A key film from this period was *Bullet Boy*, a story that focused on the issue of gun crime by a documentary maker called Saul Dibb. The film was an attempt to reflect the modern reality within Britain's inner cities. When 18 year old Ricky is released from a youth offender's institute, he desperately wants to avoid returning to his criminal past. However, Ricky almost immediately gets embroiled in incident involving his best friend, Wisdom, and a local rival. This confrontation soon escalates into a series of reprisal attacks, resulting in both young men being murdered and Ricky's young brother on the verge of becoming seduced by the allure of gun subculture. The filmmakers clearly felt that they could use a quasi- social realist cinematic approach to bring forward this issue as evident in their press release:

Its naturalistic representation of characters, time and place, and its use of authentic language have drawn comparisons with milestone British films like Ken Loaches *Kes* and Horace Ove's *Pressure*. *Bullet Boy* Press Release.

However in the main, *Bullet Boy* is not even tangentially about socio-political commentary. Gun crime has been explained as a cultural problem without any reference to sustained and structured inequality. Within *Bullet Boy*, criminality has been framed in relation to the perceived behavioural and cultural characteristics of a specific racial group - social policy is not shown as responsible for Ricky's predicament - its the individuals inability to make suitable life choices which is to blame, and it entails no relationship between the state and ethnic minorities.

This was quickly followed by a number of films that claimed to deal with issues of black crime and gang subculture in London, presented through a number of themes such as the underground

music scene or the drugs trade, such as *Life and Lyrics*, *Rollin With the Nines*, *Kidulthood* (Menhaj Huda, 2006) *Adulthood* (Noel Clark, 2008) and *Shank* (Mo Ali, 2010). The film worlds embracing of the urban film represented the worst form of white liberal guilt for the oppressed 'other'. Blacks had been making and featuring in films for decades with few critical column inches dedicated to it. Suddenly, when these films are made with the endorsement of New Labour, the BBC and Channel 4 they were aggrandised as being innovative and culturally valid. It was an arrangement that seemed to satisfy everyone. The liberal Channel 4 and the left wing liberal middle class press that were equally ashamed of Britain's aristocratic, colonial past and the BBC desperate for absolution for decades of marginalising black arts and to avoid the perpetual fear of losing part of its licence fee to Channel Four. However, as the BBC and Channel Four fought to become the avatar of British urban film culture, blacks themselves became not the chief contributors or the consumers, but the mere objects of the products of middle class imaginations, steeped in pre conceived notions and anecdotes from both British liberal and right wing press. Their job was merely to feature, but not to theorize, strategize or steer it. More crucially, because of the concentration and composition of films like *Bullet Boy*, *Kidulthood*, and various TV dramas with ethnic characters, there was an inordinate pressure on each film to be representative, and say as much as possible in one filmic statement. However, this had a marginalizing effect that seemed to reinforce rather than ameliorate the otherness of the subjects. In addition, the various left, liberal and middle class media's obsession with the self-gratifying practices of respect for cultural difference found a particular expression in this form of multiculturalism in the way black films have been embraced, and a seductive property of multiculturalism is the cultural validity it affords the liberal middle class. However, approaching all cultures as equal, in the sense of equivalence as opposed to equality – and hence open to criticism remains the key flaw in the historical and current critiques of black British filmmaking, demonstrated in the critical response to *Bullet Boy*:

A shockingly stark and gritty portrait of what life is like for a young black man growing up in urban London and all the trials and tribulations that go with it. If you need a reality check, then this is a must see movie. BBC.

What gives the film such topical punch is the devastating portrait that it paints of the gun culture that has crept into our inner cities. Dibb's social drama is unsparingly frank; it's an important and impressive debut. The Times

The reluctance of film reviewers to openly criticise black filmmaking has hindered the development of an improved aesthetic, and in this case the sociological quality of black cinema, which can only be achieved by exposure to a universal criteria that is unaffected patronage, hyper-liberalism and the fear of charges of racism.

At this point, we must also unpick 'black filmmaking' as a term - Saul Dibb is white, as were the producer, writer and director of *Babylon*. *Babylon* however effectively highlights both civic racism and institutional racism in the form of police harassment and brutality - unlike *Bullet Boy*, which attempts to investigate themes present in *Babylon* like youth unemployment and gun crime with no depth of analysis into the systemic causes of these issues, rendering the film thin and clichéd.

Within this permissive climate, a sense of expectancy existed amongst black and ethnic minority filmmakers that a lasting black film culture could finally find its stride. A default charge against essentialised funding and cultural programmes preserved for ethnic minorities was that those producers and practitioners involved in the decision making process have lacked the cast of mind, effective organisation skills or even the interest to effectively develop a lasting black British film culture despite the density of the opportunities they were offered, and have failed to maximise the compensatory power afforded to them. However, while provisions were made for ethnic minority inclusion in the form of film education and workshops, evidence suggests minority ethnic groups had difficulties in accessing funds for feature film development and production, rendering the numerous schemes put in place by the Arts Council abortive. Of the 106 applications to the Film Council's New Cinema Fund 2007, the application response rate amongst ethnic minorities was 38%. Of that, only 4% of awards went to minority ethnic applicants, 26% to women (27% response rate) and none to those with a disability (8% response rate). The Premiere Fund's 99 awards comprised 3 % to ethnic minority applicants (response rate 58%), 27% to women (36% response rate), and none to disabled applicants (response rate 16%). Minority ethnic applicants received 8% of the 409 awards from the Development Fund's (response rate 60%), women took 30% (response rate 50%) and people with disabilities 7 % (response rate 15.6%).¹² From this evidence, it can be concluded that if a marginalised and minority social group are identified for the purpose of cultural development, it is likely those very schemes and programmes implemented, and ultimately the results will in turn be marginal and minor.

A study of minority ethnic film professionals' views undertaken by the BFI in 2000 showed there was considerable discontent about the film establishment of the UK. Respondents felt that the BFI was dominated by white middle-class men and women who were seen to have a limited understanding of minority groups and their cultural needs. They also believed there to be a lack of investment and staff involvement in both black and Asian affairs within the BFI.¹² In response, the BFI took steps in the years that followed to set up film festivals on both African and black film in the form of the African Odysseys programmes and made concerted efforts to develop and cultivate its diversity strategy in education and exhibition minority ethnic groups.

The late 1990's saw a spate of films which depicted the decay of working-class masculinity and men undergoing crises with the loss of manufacturing industries like *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*. Regional working-class identity is viewed as relatively stable and this makes it easier to export the British image abroad. More crucially, ethnic characters are virtually non-existent; the few who are present remain on the periphery. The few attempts to incorporate ethnic characters in films depicting the working class suffered from a lack of fidelity. In *Secrets and Lies* (Mike Leigh, 1996) a young black professional woman decides to seek out her biological mother after the death of both her black foster parents, discovering that her mother is in fact white.

While the film attempts to distort the traditional colour coding of black and white social standings (her mother is part of the white working class, while she represents the black middle class) what is absent in *Secrets and Lies* is cultural awareness – Marianne Jean Baptiste's performance as a mixed race character is devoid of plausibility as her ethnic composition is in no way mixed race. In addition, as the narrative is not told from a black perspective despite the black character being central to the story, it could be suggested that the ethnic character has been created to supply visual interest to an otherwise white film.

Anti-racist politics have had a both mutually beneficial and antagonised relationship with state multiculturalism. While opportunities have been created via a cultural discourse for ethnic minorities, within this embrace between the multiculturalists and their experimental subjects, credible testimonies and dialogue of mainstream racism of the present day are muted.

Multiculturalism manifests itself in cultural equality, as opposed to socio-political equality. The core of this argument is that culture, be it in the form of ethnic or national, remains a commodity that can both be made profitable and provide a cultural validation to those who implement it and those who subscribe to and consume it. However, political equality offers no such dividend. The notion of a political equality implicates the government in that *existing* inequality in its various forms has continued unabated despite its evident detrimental effects, and exposes the government as wilful allies of the status quo.²¹

The legacy of this New Labour discourse is that inequality has become understood almost exclusively through the prism of race and ethnicity, contested through multiculturalism.

However, this disregards the existence of a multi-racial working class.³ Politically, the interests of this multi-ethnic working class is not seen as having a place in the classless multiculturalism, with the focus being on building an ethnic minority middle class by engineering diversity within the leading professions.³ Further, the term 'white working class' suggests that people of ethnicity can not be considered as working class, occupying the position of the other.

This discourse can explain the absence from much of British social realism from the 1990's onwards of the presence of ethnic minority characters. It could also be suggested that the reason why an overtly political filmmaker such as Ken Loach has never investigated issues of race and inequality from a black working class point of view is because he may feel unqualified to do so as a white director. However, in the context of social realism, if the director approaches the issue from a Marxist perspective this would enable him to transcend the *racial* dimension, as those Marxist perspectives on class form the higher universal category. In theory, the former contributes to the development of a false dichotomy in the way that historically the British government compartmentalise the working class by racial definitions in order to undermine the potential for the collectivisation of working class people's interests and experiences.

It is possible that there may be other reasons why a director does not feel they can work through the issues that would link the particular (race) to the more general (class) in a cinematic work of

art - which is different to theorising the issue. It is possible that it is more prosaic, and Loach has never had the opportunity to direct a story/script that would accomplish this objective. His dependency on his scriptwriters, firstly Jim Allen (white) and when he died, Paul Laverty (also white), could also suggest the issue is more correlated to how the scriptwriters feel about the class-race nexus.

Both explanations are equally plausible. While race and class are (or can be) related, there is axiomatically a world of difference between them. Even as a middle class Oxbridge educated white male, Loach has no problem in observing and analysing (often Northern) working class culture. Maybe one could speculate that even if he doesn't 'belong' in this milieu, it is something he is familiar with and is comfortable commenting upon it. However, when it comes to observing and analysing black culture, it is something with which Loach has had no real connection and does "not feel comfortable with"

"I find 'race' such a miss-applied word; I'm not comfortable with that phrase. I'm interested in the collective experience, be it Irish or Spanish or black, or anything. But contemporary black culture is very distinctive, I'm old, I've no direct experience of the lives they live. I would not be comfortable with it." Ken Loach

From this, while Loach can recognise that a collectivised working class exists, there is still something of a fear that white directors making films about black culture would be seen as crass and lacking in understanding and/or authenticity no matter how good or bad the film might actually be. In addition, the vast majority of Ken Loaches films, and films that fall under the social realism umbrella in general tend to be set in Northern towns and cities - 45% of non-whites live in London alone. So in one sense his film's ethnic composition accurately reflects many parts of England presented in his films. However, what has been cultivated is an ideology that cannot stand firm under the weight of scrutiny considering that Britain's history of migration is of immigrants assimilating into an existing class structure at working class level, if we consider that ethnic minorities make up 35% of the retail workforce, while 14% of public transport drivers are ethnic minorities ⁷. Domestic workers are nearly two thirds likely to be of black or ethnic minority origin, while unemployment amongst black youth remains above the European average. Exposure to poverty is still overwhelmingly organised by race. If you are born black and poor, your chances of remaining poor remain significantly higher than if you are born white and poor. This is because race - for all the piecemeal years of race equality

legislation still acts as the chief barrier to equal access to the opportunities of British life. What is evident is that ethnic minorities still lack the kind of filmic representation that reflects the reality of 21st century working class Britain.

The recent cuts made by the Arts Council may now have signaled the end of essentialised funding to black and ethnic minority arts. And with issues of race and identity returning to public consciousness, adequate consideration must now be given to whether a distinctively 'black' identity still exists. What needs to be dismantled is the naïve rhetoric that a single film or character can ventriloquise for an entire socio-ethnic community. When an artistic practice is ethicized, it is instantly marginalized, pushing it further away from the mainstream that it is trying to assimilate into. That is the cross purpose; films and filmmakers want to be recognized as different but still want it to be accepted wholeheartedly into mainstream British cinema.

What must be recognized is that in terms of film and television, black is essentially a politically constructed category, and fixing a hegemonic version of what it means to be black British is a long established ideological maneuver and like all ideology, such discourses attempt to organize people's mannerisms and their perception of themselves. But from a diasporic perspective, that black and ethnic minority cultural homogeneity has become fragmented by issues such as class. Present identities are heterogeneous, and black Britain is internally divided and less cohesive than the white middle or upper classes. Black culture is multiply constituted and can no longer be reduced to a singular formation around which a fixed identity can be constructed. Thus, a one - tone approach to a behavioural conduct cannot form the standard to which an entire race can be amalgamated into a filmic representation. This is the existing cross purpose; the need for a film culture that displays ethnic minorities as assimilated, prosperous and with social and economic agency, and a cinema that recognises existing systemic inequality and oppression amongst a black working class. This is where film and TV writers, directors and producers are often found wanting. Evidently, diversity quotas do not take into consideration not only the divided identity of black Britain, but also the *antagonistic* relationship that exists. The black middle class will reject negative depictions of blacks as the oppressed other not only because multiculturalism has popularised the idea of a post racial British society, but also in order to distinguish themselves from the lower black working classes below.

Ethnic minorities formed a cohesive group in conflict with Thatcherism, and in particular the white middle class film industry, and in challenging this authority through cinema, in fact, actually helped make them stronger and more cohesive, as they collectivised in opposition against the oppressive frameworks in Britain in the 1980's. However, through multiculturalism and the race to assimilate into middle class society via New Labour rhetoric, that very black British identity has become much more individualised, less cohesive and more internally divided. They now lack the solidarity of the previous generation and therefore, possess insufficient power to collectively mount an adequate and effective challenge to the current hegemony.

Much of the films mentioned in this chapter refrain from outlining a coherent political imperative precisely because of the daunting task it represents narratively. What we have witnessed via state multiculturalism is the depoliticization and culturalisation of social and political life. Equally, black films in Britain are more concerned with how closely they approximate socio-cultural (as opposed to socio-political) realities, where credible issues of racial inequality and discrimination created by systemic frameworks fail to insinuate themselves anywhere in the narrative.

Explaining social exclusion in cultural terms provides a decidedly inaccurate illustration of a much more complex social landscape. Current cinematic and televisual discourses still do not provide an adequate and in-depth explanation of the inequalities produced in societies in which the racialised continue unabated to be the targets of institutionalised discrimination and scapegoating.

Admittedly, a key difference is presence - in the late 1970s and 1980s there was the first depictions of black Britons and this had a political dimension because of perceptions of police oppression and social disorder. That remains the case now, albeit in a much more sophisticated form, yet there have been very few depictions of black people in a political way on screen - young Muslims have now taken this position in both radical and conservative discourse. Black characters have now been depoliticised in the name of multiculturalism while visible on screen, often as periphery characters or in professionals where race is seldom mentioned.

Though no clear resolutions are visible, what is apparent is that it is the way these characters are selected and contextualized that determines whose interest is being serviced. It's not solely an absence of ethnic minority characters from British film; the characters emerge, but in a range of modes that deny their full inclusion. To subscribe to current trends would be to accept that black

characters can only occupy roles as the oppressed 'other' or the subject of white anxiety. What must be avoided is a series of unconvincing ethnic characters pushed into a narrative to fulfill diversity quotas. The specificity of race is unnecessary if it leads to the establishment of tokenism by film and TV producers afraid of appearing racist in a liberal artistic environment.

It could be suggested that the rift between black filmmakers and the British film establishment stemmed from the fact that the decision makers are almost entirely white; problems can arise when commissioners see little economic or cultural benefit in financially supporting and commissioning the development of black filmmakers and a black film culture. They do not fully understand the essential cultural framework of black and Asian scripts, and are thus not in a suitable position to effectively assess a film's potential commercial and critical impact. Therefore, despite the changes made in the British film industry, it is suggested that the vast majority have been maladroit. The film industry still does not fully represent the racial composition of the UK and takes a narrow view of where talent may be found. Existing recruitment practices are at the core of this issue, making it arduous for specific groups to consolidate a position in the industry. This has, and will continue to restrict the kinds of films that are produced in the UK and expand the verticality between the British film industry and diverse audiences.¹² In addition, Channel 4's multicultural department, initially aggrandised as fundamental to changing Britain's white middle class dominated industry, failed in its objective to develop a lasting black film production culture, and ultimately served as piecemeal tokenism that allowed the mainstream of the channel to continue its programming untouched by the increased demands for a balanced representation of ethnic minorities in the film and television industry, and the changing face of British society.

Many subscribe to the notion that Britain is now a post racial society where race and ethnicity is no longer a barrier to success and individual character, application and endeavour are now the determinants to life chances. However, in a society where black and ethnic minorities continue to occupy the poorest areas of Britain in the most substandard council housing, black youths continue to be targeted in stop and search tactics by the police, an inefficient educational system that sees nearly 60% of black boys continually fail to reach the benchmarked 5 a-c grades at GCSE level and a high proportion are excluded, an employment market that continues to make it

difficult for ethnic minorities to secure places in key decision making roles across a number of both public and private sectors, far right mobilisation in the form of the BNP and the EDL, now is a period charged with difficulties of living as marginalized minorities in 21st century Britain. Racism persists because there has been no serious political effort to challenge the interconnections between the concept of race and the structures and institutions of the British state.

The political and cultural veiling of racism through a mobilisation and privileging of the language of multiculturalism must be interrogated cinematically as this semantic movement has cultivated an inability and reluctance to openly engage with race, its genesis in European political thought and the consequences for individual and collective lives in Britain. Current cinematic and televisual discourses still do not provide an adequate and in depth explanation of the inequalities produced in societies in which the racialised continue unabated to be the targets of institutionalised discrimination and scapegoating.⁷

A political cinema is the only way that black film practitioners can operate within the industry and against the government. However, it will not be possible for ethnic minority film practitioners to cultivate a new filmic movement to parallel that of the 1970's and 1980's, one that is capable of being firm, creative and determined enough to engage directly and effectively in the *politics* of ethnic minority existence while themes and issues that compose current films continue to be culturalised, separating them analytically from the very political economy in which they are an axiom.

Attitudes and approaches need to change considerably before black film can be regarded as an integral aspect of British culture. The film and TV institutions are completely versed in notions of an all encompassing black identity, but this narrow-mindedness about representation, and the fact that the very policy makers and BME organisations put in place to inform ethnic minority cultural discourses are perpetually failing to find common ground on which to effectively address race equality and diversity continues to overwhelm any artistic ambition. Filmmakers must be again introduced to the idea that social realism has the potential to once again be the internal threat to the phantom ideal national identity and culture, which can be symbolised by effectively bringing social unrest, unemployment and racial discrimination and tension to screen in a socio-political form, with unequivocal conviction as to who is culpable.

If black British filmmaking, currently congruent with notions of post racialism, is to successfully refute legitimate charges of being maladroit, ineffective and apolitical it must venture into the world of concrete socio-political engagement. If black filmmaking needs to be re-politicized, then social realism is the cinematic device, the genre, or even the approach, with which to achieve it. It must provide a politics capable of coherently presenting racial discrimination, ideas and stimulating activity, inclusive dialogue and mobilisation. However, the difficulty is that, with very few exceptions, British black writers/directors/film makers have been (and continue to be) relatively thin on the ground, having being denied the chance to establish long-lasting careers, and even a ground breaking director such as Horace Ove is still obscure in terms of the various histories of British cinema. Who then is (or can be) the authentic filmic voice of British black political culture?

Notes

1. Lentin, Alana/ Titley, Gavan (2011) *The Crisis of Multiculturalism*, Zed Books
2. Kobena Mercer (1988) *Black Film, British Cinema*, ICA Documents
3. Jones, Owen (2011) *Chavs – The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso
4. Nelmes, Jill (2007) *Introduction to film studies*.
5. Murphy, R. (2009) *The British Cinema Book*. London, British Film Institute
6. Murphy, Robert. (2000) *British Cinema of the 1990's*, British Film Institute
7. Alexander, Claire. James, Malcolm. (2011) *New Directions, New Voices – Emerging Research on Race and Ethnicity*. Runnymede Trust Publication
8. Calindo, Stephen. (2010) *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*. Routledge
9. Hobson, D. (2007) *Channel 4: The Early Years and the Jeremy Isaacs Legacy*. London: I B Tauris & Co.
10. Newland, P. (2010) *Don't Look Now: British Cinema in the 1970s*. Bristol: Intellect.
12. Something, Something (2007) *Barriers to Diversity in Film*. London, Film Council Publication
13. McSmith, Andy (2010) *No Such Thing as Society :A History of Britain in the 1980s*. Constable
14. Friedman, Lester D. (1993) *Fires Were Started – British Cinema and Thatcherism*
15. Hallam, J. (2000) *Realism and Popular Cinema*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
16. Kirk, John. (2009) *The British Working Class in the 20th Century – Film TV and Literature*.
17. Rawnsley, Andrew (2001) *Servants of the People*.
18. Vinen, R. (2010) *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s*. London: Simon & Schuster.
19. Lay, Samantha. (2002) *British Social Realism*. London: Wallflower.
20. Cousins, Mark (2007) *The Story of Film* London: Pavilion
21. Craig, Gary. (2008) *Social Justice and Public Policy: Seeking Fairness in Diverse Societies* London: Policy Press

22. Fryer, P. (2003) *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain: Black People in Britain Since 1504*. London: Pluto Press
23. Hayward, Anthony (2004) *Which Side Are You On? Ken Loach and His Films*. London: Bloomsbury.
24. Interview conducted with Ken Loach (2011)
25. Interview conducted with Dr Rob Berkley (2011)
26. Interview conducted with Mamoun Hassan, (2011)
27. Interview conducted with Dr Freddie Gaffney, (2011)