

My name is Patricia Francis. I'm a part-time doctoral research student at Nottingham Trent University and over the next twenty minutes I will use my film *Making Waves* to explore how, as a director, I created an oral history film to explore the Black British experience in the East Midlands focusing on two generations, providing a platform for individuals and for conversation.

I made *Making Waves* in June 2015 as response to my first film in 2013 *Many Rivers To Cross*, which followed the lives of nine people who came to the UK from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s. If *Many Rivers to Cross* focused on the Windrush generation, *Making Waves* tells the story of their children and grandchildren's experience of growing up in Britain. It asked how effective the 1976 Race Relations Act was and if the actions of the first generation had a positive impact on the second.

I wanted to analyse two generations' experiences of being Black in Britain using a comparable social and political context. Both generations experienced early adulthood with a Conservative government in power and an unstable economy.

The theme of water was significant in my thinking. In my first film, the Atlantic Ocean was the most significant of the many symbolic rivers my contributors had to cross in order to establish a socially acceptable position for themselves in Britain. In contrast, *Making Waves* explores the struggles Black Britons faced as they claimed social parity, troubling the waters and making waves in their attempts to do so.

The film focused on individuals from two cities, Nottingham and Leicester, I wanted to take the focus away from London and to demonstrate that the same issues existed in the regions.

The film is a cross- and inter-generational conversation analysing the riots as 'uprisings' and their part in the **making of waves**. It includes the accounts of two people who took part in acts of dissent; Monica disguised in a black balaclava recalls in detail her involvement on the frontline during the 1981 uprising in Nottingham, and Boston captured, on his mobile phone, the resulting situation that occurred and the police response during an EDL march. He was in Leicester and filmed the frenetic havoc of police vans mounting curbs where the public were innocently standing,

Already the generational difference is discerned in the act of protest as a memory, only shared publicly through the film, is contrasted to Boston's film footage that I included and that also demonstrates the role and authority that social media has now in bringing such experiences to a wider public and exposing them.

In *Making Waves*, individual agency within Black British experiences was explored. I was, as director, attempting to disturb our thinking about historically constructed concepts of 'Blackness' and essentialist assumptions about a monolithic black experience, but I was very conscious of the burden of expectation or what Kobena Mercer called "the burden of representation" in a situation where there are still too few opportunities where ordinary Black Britons are given the right and the chance to speak.

My ambition was not to speak on behalf of the 'Black community', but to demonstrate its plurality. My aim was not to counter, and so validate the racist philosophy that defines a social practice in engaging with someone Black, but instead to explore a position that both argues for and against a conception of Britishness where, using Michel Foucault'sⁱ construct of racism, **our** blood, lineage and sexuality is seen as invested in the construct and so an alternative and equitable bio-political space may be claimed.

I was clear that my role as a Black woman director was to afford my contributors visibility whilst I remain invisible to the audience. It was also important to build trust and a rapport with my contributors. I therefore met with them for an extended period of time prior to filming. They were clear on the purpose of the film but not the specifics of questions that would be posed. This would be their film and I wanted to create a spontaneity in their responses and a means through which I could facilitate the articulation of their different and shared experiences. I was, as the film director and artist Trinh T. Minh-Ha termed it, "speaking nearby" **and** listening closely to their personal stories of alienation and injustice, as they recounted the effects racial discrimination had on their young and adult lives. I tried to create a space where two generations, experiencing similar socio-political contexts, could make comparative analysis of their own sensibilities themselves.

SHOW CLIP

In: 32:19

"I come from a very political family"

Out: 33:17

"definitely that's true...yeah"

Time: 58secs

This was a multi-vocal film. I interviewed thirteen people including a mother and daughter, and tried to ensure an even gender mix across both cities. The two generations debated many issues: education, racism versus discrimination, their perception of the effectiveness of the Race Relations Act and the reasons for their mistrust of the police. I made the directorial decision that what should come through strongly is an unobtrusive witnessing of their thoughts as they both converged in opinion and disagreed.

SHOW CLIP

In: (2:30) "When I was growing Up"
Out: (4:40) "... why can't I do that?"
Time 2min 10s

Michael Omi and Howard Winant have argued that 'racism originates in subjectivity, **not** in structures or institutions or practices.'ⁱⁱ Instead, I believe, that at the micro-level we are subject to the indoctrinating and ubiquitous power of institutions that manipulate and influence how we think about ourselves and of others. The manifestation of this is demonstrated in my contributors who, as young impressionable children seek social acceptance. At such an early life stage they already intuited that their colour will be an impediment to that.

Using Foucault and whiteness studies, Ladelle McWhorter sets out his theory regarding the origins of racism being focussed on; '*cultivating individuals, altering their bearing and conducts, breaking them down into their parts and gestures and reconstituting them - as soldiers or as factory workers.*'ⁱⁱⁱ By the 19th century Foucault argues that disciplinary power became normalising power, '*...seeking to manage individuals in relation to norms of development set out by natural and human sciences.*'^{iv} Biopower, then, evolved with the **exertion of discipline** at the micro level and **population management** at the macro level.

In 1981, the unemployment statistics for Pakistani/Bangladeshi men was 26% compared to 10% for White men. When the recession was at its highest in 1982, Black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi men's unemployment rate reached nearly 30% as compared with only 12% for White men.^v Similarly in 1985, an enquiry into the underachievement of children from ethnic minority groups in schools claimed that 'teacher's attitude towards, and expectations of, West Indian pupils may be subconsciously influenced by stereotyped, negative or

patronising views of their abilities and potential, which may prove a self-fulfilling prophecy, and can be seen as a form of 'unintentional racism'^{vi}. There was acknowledgement that the system was failing the children, and in referring to them as 'West Indian' pupils the British heritage of these Black British children was not being recognised.

SHOW CLIP

In: (18:01) "I experience racism..."
Out: (19:32) "Things only have the power you grant them."
Time: 1min 31s

Today in 2018, as we hear about and witness, (through the power of social media), deaths in custody and at the hands of the police; as we are told about the numbers of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people who continue to face a job and pay gap when compared to white counterparts, and as the Lammy Review makes recommendations regarding the disproportionate numbers of BAME individuals in the criminal justice system, 'Black' is still constructed as socially deviant.

The deviant is then, consequently, obliged to legitimise its very existence and in so doing antagonises 'Whiteness', its biological insecurities and economic sureties.

My contributors presented a rationale for the uprisings that occurred after Mark Duggan was killed.

SHOW CLIP

In: (26:38) "In 2011 I was involved in the riots...uprising."
Out: (27:13) "...my best friend."
Time: 55s

Making Waves endeavoured to discern the emotional stimulus that sparked the impassioned mass response to the killing of Mark Duggan, who was, a stranger but Black like many of those who demonstrated. The film was also my effort to counter dominant media and political voices detracting from the social disparity that many within non-white communities were challenging. In 2011, The Daily Mail for example editorialised that: 'Those hand-wringing over today's riots would have us believe the explosion of savage behaviour represents the modern cry of a disaffected people, struggling in the inner city under the yoke of economic and state oppression. But such a narrative of

victimhood is absurd. There was no 'legitimate grievance' behind the mass thuggery, only feral mob rule which should have no place in a civilised society.'^{vii}

Following the social disorder in Brixton back in 1981, Lord Scarman was appointed to carry out an inquiry and given power to make recommendations. He suggested then that institutional racism did not exist. Instead, he pointed to the racially prejudiced actions of 'some' officers. The report also recommended the recruitment of more minority groups into the police force and changes in training and law enforcement. The Independent Police Complaints Authority was also formed.

Making Waves demonstrates that a mistrust that derives partly from this moment still exists with police and institutions. It exposes the disaffection felt by this particular Black British cohort. The contributors still feel a disconnect between themselves as Black British nationals and Britain, the place they were born.

SHOW CLIP

In: 29:13 "I would describe myself as"

Out: 30:55 "At the same time I don't identify with what it means to be British."

Time: 1min 42s

Skin colour had significance to my contributors and was a key descriptor when they were defining themselves. Gone is any desire to be white. Embracing their British heritage brought existential challenges for those I interviewed; they have grown accustomed to having to navigate social, economic and racist politics that govern and limit their achievements. Foucault's Biopower is clearly at play as they describe, with experiential particularity, exclusion, alienation, bigotry and violence.

In *Making Waves*, I exposed Black Britishness as variously self-defined and cross-generationally nuanced. It was my intention that the film would not be an echo chamber. I did not seek out participants who are key figures in their communities or who are accustomed to speaking for them, or speaking publicly at all. I knew that some of my white audiences would be unfamiliar, consciously or unconsciously, with this Black British narrative and some would be unconsciously complicit in the social disparity my subjects explicated, whilst having the power, at a micro level, to prompt socio-political changes.

It is reasonable to say that my intention was like that of film makers that Minh-Ha describes as aiming ‘...to represent others, and to be their loyal interpreters.’ I neither consider myself an anthropologist nor an ethnographer though. I was keen to show the vulnerabilities, the social consequences and the psychological impact of racialised power on individuals who in talking to me were aware that my own experience would not be dissimilar to theirs. As the director of their stories, I had a responsibility to interpret their experience as it was intended by them. This was not an opportunity for sensationalist journalism but rather the chance to add to a cultural archive that is compiling and defining contemporary Black British experiences.

SHOW CLIP

In: 35:07

“No, I don’t feel very optimistic”

Out: 35:48

“I think the future should be better.”

Time 35sIn

In *Making Waves* I have created an archival oral history documentary piece that speaks of a racism that still attempts to homogenise Black British plurality. But the film also shows a Black British defiance and resilience that appears to continue through successive generations. My directorial position was unassuming to tease out reflections about the everyday (that might not seem a radical aim) but in providing a platform for ordinary working-class voices to be heard and listened to, I hoped to open a conversation.

In the larger historical context of the potential impact of the 1976 Race Relations Act, I dare to hope *Making Waves* will be a useful artefact in future historical analysis regarding the plurality of the Black British experience.

SHOW CLIP

In: (31:13 – 31:24)

“Black and British... grown up in England?”

Time: 11s

Thank you.

ⁱ Foucault’s argues that, power is ‘exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power...’ For Foucault the origin of racism is bound up with blood, lineage, sexuality, hierarchy and the biologising of race, and is concerned with; ‘protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race.’ (Foucault, 1978:149)

ⁱⁱ McWhorter, L., 2005. Where do white people come from? *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol 31 (Issue 5-6), p. 545

RFN2018: Radical Film Network Seminar Speech
Filming the plurality of the Black British experience across two generations.

ⁱⁱⁱ Foucault, M., 2003. *'Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey. New York: Picador. pp. 29-30

^{iv} McWhorter. L., 2005. p. 539

^v Yoajun, Li., *Ethnic unemployment in Britain (1972-2012)* [online]. Runnymede Trust: Available at <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/ethnic-unemployment-in-britain>. [Accessed 12th July 2018]

^{vi} Great Britain. Department of Education, The Swann Report (1958) Education for All. London: Controller of HMSO and the Queen's Printer for Scotland.

^{vii} Johns, Lindsay., 2011. *Apologists for these thugs should hang their heads in shame: A stinging rebuke from an inner-city youth worker*. *Mail Online* [online]. 9th August 2011. Available at: "http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2023922/London-riots-Apologists-thugs-hang-heads-shame.html" [Accessed 10th July 2018]