RACE RELATIONS IN POST WAR BRITAIN: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF ANTIBLACK STEREOTYPES BY BLACK BRITISH MINORITIES

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Abstract

The arrival of Blacks in great number in UK is due to postwar political decision to help the country which has gone to ruin. The new comers confronted to the hard reality of racism structured themselves around social movements to fight the plague and different social injustices they got embroiled in for long years. These movements fought to de-sediment the false image stick to Blacks for long centuries by pseudo-scientific from the European community. They deconstructed the base of racism to re-establish the truth concerning their race. These movements contributed to the social progress of Blacks in United Kingdom.

Keywords: Racism, Social Injustices, Social Movements, De-Sediment, Deconstruct

Résumé

L'arrivée des Noirs en masse au Royaume-Uni fait suite à une décision politique d'après-guerre pour aider le pays tombé en ruine. Les nouveaux venus, confrontés à la dure réalité du racisme se sont organisés autour de mouvements et organisations sociales pour se défendre et combattre les différentes injustices sociales qui leur étaient imposées. Ces mouvements se sont battus pour de-sédimenter la fausse image collée aux Noirs pendant plusieurs siècles par des pseudo-scientifiques européens. Ils déconstruisirent ainsi les fondements racistes pour rétablir la vérité sur leur race. Ces mouvements ont contribué au progrès social des Noirs au Royaume-Uni.

Mots-clés: Racisme, Injustices Sociales, Mouvements Sociaux, De-Sédimenter, Déconstruire

Introduction

The sedimentation of the Blacks negative and degrading image started during slavery when Europeans arrived in Africa during the 17th century. "Africa [was considered] as a place full of non-human monsters, idolatry, barbarism and unbridled sexuality" (A. Mama, p. 18). In addition to the racial prejudice that they underwent, false theories were developed by European pseudo-scientists in their description of Africans. For the French scholar, Gobineau who produced "what is now seen by many as the master text of nineteenth-century European racism, L'essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines, [for example], Africans were devoid of intelligence and unable to think in any reflective manner" (A. Mama, 2002, p. 19). These assumptions concerning Blacks amplified during the massive immigration of west-Indians and Africans in Britain after the Second World War. The racist behaviour and social injustices that Blacks undergo in United Kingdom can be found in these assumptions that were developed against them. The racist construction of the image of Blacks, the racial hatred they were victims of, and the social difficulties Blacks were confronted to led the African British to organise themselves around movements and associations to re-establish their dignity and their honour. The objective of this present article is to show that the creation of movements and different associations by African British in order to de-sediment the wrong image that preceded their arrival in United Kingdom contributed to integrate them. The deconstruction concept developed by the French theorist, Jacques Derrida, asserts that a fix structure does not exist. Therefore, the assumptions that have been developed by European scientists during the previous centuries and that have been taken for granted are, sometimes, wrong. The Derridean theory can help to reach the paper objective. The European racial discourse and orderly vision of races asserting that Blacks are monsters, barbarians, not able to think by themselves and should be at the bottom of the racial and social ladder is decentered by different black British movements in United Kingdom through their fights. The struggle of these associations of Blacks in UK de-sedimented the idea that an established and stable structure of superiority and inferiority between race does not exist. First, This article sheds light on the stereotypes Blacks are victims of, secondly, it discloses the fight Black British led to deconstruct false ideas sedimented in European psychology and, finally, the paper exposes the positive results of this struggle.

1. Blacks in UK and stereotypes before their arrival

Stereotypes concerning Blacks are attitudes held by whites concerning the Negroes without any factual foundation. The search into the background of history permits to discover that Whites constructed the untrue image of Blacks in the Whites popular imagery through clichés. All started during thralldom and the need of justification of supporters of slavery to excuse the Africa trade and the ill-treatment of Blacks. Indeed, Robert Marshall Seeley poses that: "it was necessary, if slavery were to be justified, that the Negro be proven to be something less than a man –that he be proven mentally, morally, and spiritually inferior to the white peoples of the earth" (R. M. Seeley, 1951, p. 31). In this perspective, European church, Science and philosophy became the staunch advocate of this doctrine of inequality. Before that the British abolished the Africa trade in 1808 and passed the emancipation in 1833, it was already widespread, and anchored in the British white spirit that Blacks bondage is God's plan since this group of persons is docile and incapable of initiative. In the southern part of the United States Christians nourished:

> The Negroes, as descendants of Ham, were Inferior because they had been cursed by Noah and condemned to eternal servitude of the white man. Leading southern theologians developed doctrines in support of slavery, seeking to give it the appearance of having gained God's approval, and thereby making it a socially accepted system in harmony with Christian doctrine and belief. (R. M. Seeley, 1951, p. 32)

Religion was not alone to sustain that Blacks did not deserve the treatment accorded to human being. Besides the reasons developed by church in the southern part of the United States, some white scientists unfolded miscellaneous theories to denigrate and emphasize the inferiority of the black race. The use of racism in Science was developed by important personalities of the European and American scientific world. Among them, William Shockley and James D. Watson are Nobel Laureates and very respected in the scientific world. The two American scientists of white race during the twentieth century were convinced that "blacks belonged to lower species of humanity" (The JBHE Foundation, 2007, p. 89). The biologist

Watson argued in an interview with the British newspaper *Sunday Times* that "blacks are lazy, fat, happy-go-lucky, and have an overactive sex drive" (The JBHE Foundation, 2007, p. 89). These statements, sedimented in the psychology of white people that their race is superior to the black race. When such statements are voiced by respected biologists it sounds true even if it is wrong.

Before them, the British well-known paleontologist Charles Darwin who wrote *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of the Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life (1859)* held the same discourse. This book is an extravaganza of racism which shaped whites 'racial ideology. Darwin states: "The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilized state, as we may hope, than the Caucasian, and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of at the present between the Negro or Australian and the gorilla" (J. Lander, 2010, p. 201). For Darwin, the smallest gap between ape and humankind was between the gorilla and Blacks. The scientist belittled Blacks to the level of animals. These racist ideologies were also reinforced by the unfounded statements of Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau throughout is book named *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines.* All these subjective assumptions concerning Blacks in Britain today are the spin-off of these theories. This is concluded by Mama Amina when she summarised the Africanist discourses[1] assumptions of the last centuries by posing:

> During this period [17th to 19th century] we can discern two schools of opinion, one exemplified by Hume, the other by Rousseau. The first is a wholly negative portrayal of the savage as a subhuman and tormented creature, worthy only of pity or contempt. This is a pathological construction, of the Negro as a degraded variant of the species. The second is the 'noble savage school' which utilises the African as a vehicle for that particularly European Judaeo-Christian nostalgia for an imaginary 'lost innocence' which inten-sified during the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Whereas both schools focus on racial differences, they differ on some key questions. On the question of madness, for example, Bougainville and Rousseau assumed that 'primitives' could not suffer from insanity, living as they did in joyous and unrepressed harmony with their environment, whereas for the others they were inherently mentally defective, a more pernicious notion which was to persist into twentieth-century psychiatry. (A. Mama, 2002, p. 19)

The psychological discourses on black people during the present century has been influenced by slavery, colonialism and racist regimes. The British empire being estimated to about 80 percent of the whole world, the institutional discourse considering "black people as unquestionably mentally inferior and as exhibiting racially specific forms of pathology" (M. Amina, 2002, p. 39), could easily widespread throughout the empire and psychologically be sedimented in almost all the whites' spirit. Unfortunately, when they immigrated in Britain after the Second World War, Blacks were already preceded by racist assumptions developed by racist psychologist in the imperial power. Most of the "assumptions in psychological theory results from the uncritical retention of Eurocentric philosophical premises. Psychology has echoed these assumptions and so contributed to the reaffirmation, production and legitimation of racist discourses on Africa and Africans" (A. Mama, 2002, p. 39).

To restore their honour, their pride, culture, self-definition and their dignity, Blacks who immigrated in Britain organised themselves in movements, associations and groups to de-construct the racist assumptions developed concerning their race during slavery and the colonial period. The objective of these different groups was to rehabilitate a racial pride that has been disfigured by European and American pseudo-scientist, philosophers and the white southern church in U.S. It was also to de-sediment false racial theories widespread by the imperial power during thralldom and colonisation.

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[1] The set of knowledges and ideas about Africans devised by Europeans in the context of imperialism has been termed 'Africanist discourses'

2. The fight against racist de-sedimentation of black british movements and associations in Britain

Racial hatred that blacks were facing in Britain motivated them to create groups to fight back racism. Many movements were born after the Second World War to dovetail and reinforce Blacks' project of integration in the country. One of the most outstanding group is unquestionably the British Black Power. Rosalind Eleanor Wild in his dissertation stated: "British Black Power developed as a reaction of the post-war generation of black immigrants, who came predominantly from the Caribbean and Southern Asia, to their experience of white racism in Britain" (R. E. Wild, 2008, p. 1). This movement was supported by Blacks intellectual that came from various parts of the British imperial colonies and from U.S. Its main objective was to promote "an international focus that situated the struggle against Britain's 'colour bar' within a global struggle of the oppressed." (R. E. Wild, 2008, p. 5). During that period various issues such as community control, anti-colonialism and internationalism were important but the most decisive and the one that attracted people attention was certainly *identity*. Black Power reclaimed Black's identity in Britain from what the movement named cultural terrorism. The movement assigns itself to deconstruct racial stereotypes created by white people as pretext to enslave and to colonise Blacks. They put forward solutions to revive Blacks pride and dignity. For this purpose, some initiatives could not be ignored according to the leaders as reported by Wild:

> Self-definition - the ability to throw off the negative stereotypes of black people, black culture and black countries, historically created by white imperialists to excuse and explain their exploitative behaviour, and recognise one's own worth - would lead, it was hoped, to an empowering pride, self-respect and dignity for Britain's blacks. The adoption in Britain in the late 1960s of the word 'black', in preference to, say, West Indian, to describe oneself signified this process of self-definition, and the term implied pride and self-respect precisely because it was independently chosen. The reclamation of an independent black culture was done in myriad ways in Britain, but most strongly through a supplementary education movement for both children and adults, in which they could learn about the histories and achievements of their ancestors and contemporaries. (R. E. Wild, 2008, p. 6).

Beyond the first and most important goal which was to de-sediment false assumptions developed by whites concerning Blacks, the movement responsibility was also to fight the presupposition that the British white community is the most cultivated and that the other groups out of this race should follow them. Black Power was against the racist ideas that presented Britain as the civilised society that Blacks should aspire and even conform. This assertion veils the racist assumptions presenting Africa as an uncivilised place. Therefore, to what has been said for a long period concerning Blacks and their so called non-civilisation, Black Power rebelled. Finally, the movement revolted against the white British arguments asserting that "the biggest obstacle to integration was the inassimilable volume of black immigrants" (R. E. Wild, 2008, p. 17). For the movement, Blacks should integrate the British society as full Black British citizen without being assimilated. Assimilation cannot be a constraint to Black British integration since Blacks themselves are not suppliants.

Besides Black Power that was certainly the most outstanding group which brought contradiction to untrue ideas and ideologies that was developed in the British society concerning Blacks, some other groups for the Blacks defense developed in the British education area under the oversight of this movement. These groups were born under the initiative of women. The organisation's name was OWAAD (Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent). Under the supervision of OWAAD many local groups were created for the defense of Black women's interest. These local groups were known as "Black Women Groups". Surprisingly, all of them had a problem with the school education of their children; therefore, "Black Women Groups" decided to fight the British system of Education so as to give a chance to their children in the British society. Black women fought with the postulate that the issue of Black children in British schools is similar all over the country since racism in British education was related with the ideas that Blacks are unintelligent and stupid. And all the difficulties that Black British children were encountering in the British education system were linked to "individual and institutionalised racism of teachers and to the racist assumptions of an inward-looking, Eurocentric curriculum" (Bryan et al, 2018, p. 59).

A great number of Black children were classified Educationally Sub-Normal (ESN)[2] because according to the authorities they had a "low IQ", they speak "broken English" and they had a "hyperactive behaviour". These diplomatic words by the authorities were guising the racist beliefs that developed during slavery and colonisation which treat Blacks of "unintelligent", "unable to express themselves" and "brutal". Indeed, if White teachers in the British education system did not overtly reccognise the influence of previous assumptions in their decisions making, their behaviour toward Black children at school displays that they were forsooth under influence. Bryan poses: "Teachers and pupils alike displayed open curiosity, as they struggled to reconcile the images from a lifetime of racist conditioning with the reality, they now saw in front of them." (Bryan et al, 2018, p. 60) Finally, the production of Black children at school is the result of an extreme exasperation which has been influenced by teachers' racist attitudes as it is witnessed by a young girl in seventies:

> I remember being constantly asked by the teachers and the children where I came from, what was it like, did I live in a house or a tree, did we wear clothes, did we speak English? You begin to feel so different, you feel uncomfortable, and because you are so young you don't know how to deal with it. The way I dealt with it was I decided I wasn't going to fight it. I gave in to whatever they said. Every day at school, we had to write a diary of what we did at home. I wrote that in Jamaica we lived in trees and ran around with whatever they told us we wore, and I even drew pictures. I think it got to the stage where I wasn't sure what was true anymore, the pictures they were showing me or the memories I had in my head (Bryan et al, 2018, p. 60).

Unfortunately, instead of accusing the British system and the negative school environment to be the only responsible of the Black children failure, IQ, broken English and black children behaviour were wrongly put forward. The gathering of Black women into association to help Black children at school is to deconstruct the assumption that Blacks are not intelligent and that they had no good contribution to make to society.

Black women strategy was to challenge the system by teaching themselves with complementary education their Black school children out of school. They united their effort all over the country during their day-off to do what schools were supposed to do and did not do. Bryan added:

> It was our recognition of the need to challenge racist assumptions about the intelligence of our children which gave rise to Saturday and Supplementary Schools up and down the country. We were concerned about the education our children were getting. The teachers expected nothing from them. We formed a group because we wanted to see how we could get a better deal for our children in the school system, and how we could make sure that all of us parents knew our basic rights. Some of the parents hadn't been in the country for long, so we had to make sure they understood what was happening to the Black children over here. We started running a school on Saturdays – it was too much to do it evenings as well – and we all worked as volunteers, contributing whatever time we could. I worked in the school for over a year, and what it did for me was to make me more aware, more conscious. The children did well in the school, and this tended to encourage other parents to come along. A lot of Black parents turned up to our meetings. We got all kinds of people to come along and talk to us – educational welfare officers, councillors, even the Social Security official. So we didn't just concentrate on the children's education, we organised meetings to educate Black parents as well. But the school was the main thing (B. Bryan et al, 2018, p. 71-72).

The organisation of women in the education area in group was a direct response to counter attack a racist institutionalise system whose objectives were guided by stereotypes and racist theories. It was difficult for white British school active actors in the system such as the school headmasters, the teachers, and even the white pupils themselves to accept young Black pupils as they equal since the axioms scattered for centuries in the British society were pretending the contrary. Therefore, these groups of Black women galvanised by the Black Power Movement and organised in local associations called Black Women Group concluded that the education Black children received in the British school system was not appropriate.

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[2] The term "educationally subnormal" derived from the 1944 Education Act and was used to define those thought to have limited intellectual ability.

This system regularly led Black pupils arbitrarily out of education and make them "Educationally Sub-Normal".

The fight to deconstruct false assumptions concerning Blacks and realise their integration was also led by Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP). This radical group of Blacks founded in seventies defied racist laws and behaviours that impede members of the Black community to get housing and jobs after their massive arrival in fifties. It fought also against police brutality. BUFP members were convinced that the racist attitudes they were undergoing was the result of stereotypes engendered from slave trade and British colonial history. The organisation was inspired by American civil rights movement such as the Black Panther Party even if they did not carry guns. Alike many black organisations, they acted in the mainstream of Black British Politics since "black politics is about "overcoming exclusion from the political system, about the gaining of greater access to the institutions and decision-making processes of the state and about taking advantage of the community-orientated aspects of central governmental policy" (B. Brian, 2016, p. 480). Therefore, they worked as pressure group to impact members of the black community in decision making. BUFP also founded *Black Voice* to defend racist behaviours toward the black community. They also advocated their position as anti-racist, anti-capitalist and pro-socialist through the editorial line of this newspaper.

Since their settlement in Britain Blacks were aware of the difficulties to integrate British political and socio-economic system due to racist stereotypes developed during slavery and British colonisation. The fight of these different groups to deconstruct false ideas concerning Blacks gave a real chance to Black British to be almost integrated in the country.

3. From racist stereotypes to mitigated blacks integration in Britain

From their former status of slaves and colonised people, the offspring of Blacks who settled in Britain in fifties in great number started benefiting of the fight of deconstruction of different Blacks' group and associations. Blacks' integration in Britain, today, is certainly not perfect since Blacks and Whites are not at the same level of progress, neither in education nor in social life. For sure, the assumptions concerning the Black's race is still perceptible; racist attitudes to. But Blacks in Britain, incontestably, have made a step forward in their integration thanks to the fifties and seventies organisations. Many Black associations and groups have disappeared today, but have left a good legacy of their struggle to the Black British generation after them. Blacks are present in key sectors of British life. They are recurrently among the decision-makers since eighties. Therefore, their important responsibilities in strategic political parties as MP permit them to be at the core of the British political system.

Black British have invaded British politics even if they are not numerous enough to impact the British democracy. The most illustrious example is assuredly Diane Abbott whose name represent pride in ethnic minority group and particularly in Black British community. She is a black labour MP from Jamaican parents. Abbott is known to be the first Black British woman to be elected in the House of Commons in 1987. She also holds the record as Black to serve for the longest time in the British parliament. Aside from Abbott, many other Blacks either from the conservative party or the labour party have integrated thanks to the deconstructing fights of Black British Movements and associations political decision authorities in Britain. The first Black Members of Parliament (MP) since 1945 were elected in 1987. They were four (4) from the minority group and three of them were Blacks and elected under the cover of the British Labour Party. In 2019, 65 non-whites MPs have also been elected from three different political parties. Therefore, from 4 MPs they are 65 MPs representing all the British minority group today. After the election of 1987, MPs from the minority group were less than one percent of the British Parliament. And after the general election of 2019, they are 10 per cent. In 1987, among the four (4) MPs, Three MPs who were elected were Blacks. For the MPs' new term office that has started in 2019 they are 9, about 3 percent of the MPs parliament. 50 members of the minority group are from the house of Lord. It is about 6.3 percent of the members of that house. In addition, three Cabinet Ministers are from an ethnic minority background since 2019. These figures are perceived through British official sites without accurate details since "MPs are

not required to officially state their ethnicity. We therefore rely on external sources who collect this information, often based on Members' public assertions." (E. Uberoi, R. Tunnicliffe, 2021, p. 11)

There are no black, Asian and minority ethnic MPs in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland after the general election of 2019. In spite of this negative figure in these three nations, the present situation of Blacks in Uk is highly better compared to the assumptions and racist situations that Blacks were living during the last centuries and at the beginning of this one. This is also the gladdening judgment of Simon Woolley[3] when he says:

> I think that is a massive step forward in the right direction… Democracy works best when all of society feel they have a stake within it ... If you don't have diversity within parliament you cannot begin to effectively speak for the multicultural society that we are. It inspires many more people to engage in politics, and to believe that their voices are listened to (F. Rutherford, 2017).

The involvement of Blacks in British politics could not be imagined previously in this proportion. Their presence in political parties, their seats at Westminster, and their appointment in different British government are some signs of the functioning of democracy and the real need to create a multi-racial British society. These political assets are the result of harsh struggle led by Blacks themselves through their movements and different groups to deconstruct racial prejudices and the accreditation of their intellectual qualities.

As far as school education is concerned, important metamorphoses have been realised by Blacks. From status of students who were considered to have a low IQ, accused to express themselves in broken English and viewed to have a hyper active behaviour, they are among the students with important diplomas today.

> Education is the single most emphatic success story of the British ethnic minority experience. Over the last half century, new arrivals to Britain have seized on the opportunities afforded by the state school system and access to university. The story for some ethnic groups has been one of remarkable social mobility, outperforming the national average and enabling them to attain success at the highest levels within a generation. (Commission on race and ethnic Disparities)

Today Blacks students are still dropped out of school. But contrarily to the sixties and seventies, they are not systematically labelled as Educationally Sub-Normal as they were in the early years when they arrived in Britain. The unfair IQ test that qualified Blacks of unintelligent has been discredited and does no longer exist. The national school figures concerning Blacks are better than they were in sixties and seventies even if the facts and figures are quietly bad when they are compared to those of white people. According to the facts related to Black Caribbean ethnic group, the official facts and figures in 2019 present:

> 45% of Black 18-year-olds across England were accepted to higher education in 2019. While this was lower than rates among 18-year-olds from Chinese and Asian ethnic groups, it was well above the levels for White and Mixed ethnic groups and the overall average (35%). The entry rate of Black young people has increased from 28% in 2010, the largest increase of any ethnic group. (R. Nerys, P. Bolton, 2020, p. 4)

Thanks to the quality of the education they receive today in comparison to what were taught to them in sixties and seventies, Blacks have better jobs and can fit into British society more easily. The goal the movements and associations were struggling for was to avoid young Blacks to become the pariah of the British society. Unfortunately, many of them have failed because of the sixties and seventies school racist system. Indeed, according to the statement of Prof Gus John, in an interview with BBC "Students from ESN schools wouldn't go on to college or university. If they were lucky, they'd become a labourer. The term was paralysing and killed any sense of self-confidence and ambition." (J. B. Ashley, 2020)

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[3] Simon Woolley is one of the founders and Director of Operation Black Vote. He is a former Commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and sits on the Children' commission panel looking at excluded children. He has recently been awarded Honorary Doctorate from Westminster University for his work equality and Human Rights.

Black school children still have difficulties in Britain but the racist institutions which led them out of school has today been discredited. These pupils are no longer labelled as Educationally Sub-Normal. The presence of Black MPs or Black front benchers among the decision makers at the core of the British political system can no longer authorise this institutional racism. For sure, not all of the Black students are going to university today, they do not, obviously, according to British official facts and figures, have the same level as whites and other ethnic groups; but they are no longer misled by the decision of a racist school institution that systematically categorise them as stupid and slow learners as officially stated. The different British facts and figures show that Blacks are not classified as learners at the top of the school institution in UK. This reason militates probably in the foundation of the "London Schools and the Black Child initiative" created by the Black MP, Diane Abbott. However, this rank must not be a justification to compartmentalise some of them as Educationally Subnormal. Black groups in sixties and seventies helped to deconstruct racist assumptions in school area. The fight of the different organisations brought a serious respect to Blacks. It even stopped "one of the biggest scandals in the history of British education"[4].

Conclusion

The degrading image of Blacks in Britain started with the false assumptions developed by White racist Europeans during slavery and later during colonisation. Numerous racial prejudices were developed by European pseudo- scientists. They made believe White people superiority to Blacks. Many centuries later, when Blacks immigrated to Britain after the Second World War the presupposition concerning their race impeded their integration. Therefore, Black movements decided to deconstruct the false ipse dixit that could fetter their honour and dignity in the British society. Several Black movements and associations were created, most of the time, under the cover of the Black power. The struggle led by these associations and movements to de-sediment false dogma helped to reduce injustices against British minorities and particularly against Black British. From the foregoing analysis, it comes out that Blacks' mitigated integration in Britain has been possible thanks to the struggle of deconstruction of Blacks' movements and associations.

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[4] This statement is from a BBC broadcast programme concerning The black children wrongly sent to 'special' schools in the 1970s: A British Scandal on BBC1 on Thursday 20 May 2021 at 21:00

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