

## Pan-African Feminism in Britain: Future Directions for Solidarity and Equity

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### Abstract

This article critically examines the importance of Pan-African feminist epistemology and activism in the Diaspora. The dynamic impact of defiant struggles for freedom challenges the oppression of women of African descent in triumphant ways. The radical re-construction of identities is necessary for the evolution of their human rights. Qualitative methods are used to interrogate the political consciousness of fifty (50) women of African heritage who are members of Black women's organizations in Britain. My study investigates the relevance of Pan-African feminism in Britain to global debates and interventions. The significance of international support networks that create new strategic initiatives for positive self-concepts and the improvement of life-chances is evaluated. Independently and collectively women of African ancestry oppose marginalization by the State and systems of education, employment, healthcare, and housing. Respondents' commitment to coalition politics is evident in their positive opinions about social justice, pride, and integrity. Their celebration of Black nationalism resists the legacies of colonialism. Interviewees take responsibility for the upliftment of their communities. They are determined to overcome power inequalities in order to reaffirm the dignity of African women and girls. My fieldwork explores the ways forward for a Pan-African feminist revolution.

**Keywords:** Pan-Africanism, Feminism, Reparations, Black Lives Matter, Rastafarianism

### Résumé

Cet article examine de manière critique l'importance de l'épistémologie et de l'activisme féministes panafricains dans la Diaspora. L'impact dynamique des luttes déifiantes pour la liberté remet en question l'oppression des femmes d'ascendance africaine de manière triomphante. La reconstruction radicale des identités est nécessaire à l'évolution de leurs droits humains. Des méthodes qualitatives sont utilisées pour interroger la conscience politique de cinquante (50) femmes d'origine africaine membres d'organisations de femmes noires en Grande-Bretagne. Notre étude porte sur la pertinence du féminisme panafricain en Grande-Bretagne par rapport aux débats et interventions mondiaux. L'étude évalue l'importance des réseaux de soutien internationaux qui créent de nouvelles initiatives stratégiques pour une image positive de soi et l'amélioration des chances de vie. Indépendamment et collectivement, les femmes d'ascendance africaine s'opposent à la marginalisation par l'État et les systèmes d'éducation, d'emploi, de santé et de logement. L'engagement des répondants envers la politique de coalition est évident dans leurs opinions positives sur la justice sociale, la fierté et l'intégrité. Leur célébration du Nationalisme noir résiste aux héritages du colonialisme. Les personnes interrogées assument la responsabilité de l'amélioration de leur communauté. Elles sont déterminées à surmonter les inégalités de pouvoir, afin de réaffirmer la dignité des femmes et des filles africaines. Notre travail de terrain explore les voies à suivre pour une révolution féministe panafricaine.

**Mots clés:** Panafricanisme, Féminisme, Réparations, Les vies des Noirs comptent, Rastafarisme

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## Introduction

Powerful mainstream theories and institutions exclude and distort African feminist epistemology. Afrocentric feminist ideologies and practices are subjugated and suppressed by the dominance of racism, heteropatriarchy and class subordination. Commitment to shared histories, cultures and community building is vital. Pan-African feminism confronts interlocking systems of oppression that reinforce each other and devalue Black women's humanity. Pan-African feminists challenge the exploitative connections between race, gender, age, ability, religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation and class inequalities. Advocacy transforms race, gender, sexual and class consciousness. It develops unity, peace, security and social justice among Black women. Pan-African feminists oppose discrimination such as the miseducation of Black children in schools, police brutality and the criminalization of Black people.

In 2004 I moved from living in England to lecture at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, in Jamaica. At that time there was a vibrant, dynamic and prominent Black Women's Movement in Britain. In 2013 I was shocked by rumours about the demise of African feminism in the United Kingdom. That year, after making several inquiries, I returned to England to conduct qualitative research about the existence, strategies, relevance and future of Pan-African feminist thought and activism there. I aimed to explore the extent that Pan-African feminism in Britain is overcoming stereotypes about Black women and girls as well as contributing to their progress in Africa and in the Diaspora. I discovered that different, alternative and inclusive coalitions are required so that the unique subordination and advancement of African womanhood is fully appreciated.

This paper employs qualitative research methods to examine the perceptions of African diasporic women about Pan-African feminism in the academy and advocacy. My research project challenges the tendency of debates about Black feminism to prioritize the lives of African American women and ignore the realities of Black British women. There are numerous barriers to unity worldwide such as women's diverse experiences within the hierarchies of class, nationality, marital status, sexual orientation, skin pigmentation, age, religion, education, employment, language, political affiliation, physical and mental ability that often lead to jealousy and rivalry.

It is essential that Black women understand that the onus is on us to acknowledge both our deprivation and our privileges on local, national, regional and international levels. Usually discussions about African womanhood concentrate on trauma and abuse while ignoring our advantages, advocacy and resources. A self-reflexive approach to our identities as the oppressor and as the oppressed promotes the solidarity and equity that is vital to improve the conditions and coalitions for women and girls who live in Africa and the Diaspora. I will be referring to the diverse self-concepts of African and Black females interchangeably to mean women who were either born in Africa or originated from there. They debate their solidarity, empowerment and transformation as Pan-African feminists who actively challenge racism, sexism and class exploitation.

### The origins of Pan-African feminism in Britain

The historical omission of the special contributions of Black women activists in the UK is evident in the failure to incorporate feminist perspectives and acknowledge the immense value of the wives of Marcus Mosiah Garvey to the Pan-African liberation struggle. They were pioneers who were essential to the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) becoming most powerful between 1918 and 1923 with an estimated six (6) million members. The wisdom, commitment and fortitude of Amy Ashwood and Amy Jacques enabled Garvey to transcend adversity and inspired him to lead African people to freedom. As the most famous Black man of his time Garvey was described as a "Black Moses" and the "Ultimate Race Man." Colin Grant argues that the name "Negro with a Hat;" captured the conundrum of Marcus Garvey: a proud Negro who was revered and reviled in equal measure (Grant, 2009: xii).

The so called "Back to Africa" movement had a principle of "Race First" and dedication to the cultural and financial development of working class Black people. Imani Tafari-Ama highlights this in Garvey's notion of "Africa for the Africans, those at home and those abroad;" He suggested that by returning to Africa, displaced Africans in the Diaspora would reclaim sovereignty over their destinies and that the process of being in contact with Africans from the Continent would facilitate – an enterprise of universal resistance to neo-colonial domination by Western imperialist powers (Tafari-Ama, 2006: 121).

American and British governments collaborated to destroy Garvey and the UNIA (Robinson, 1983). At the age of fifty three (53) Marcus Garvey died lonely, exhausted and discredited. Nevertheless, Garvey's theories continue to be salient today; The Jamaican native successfully championed the cause of the African race like no one else before or since. He also proved to be the most effective Black leader to politically challenge the worldwide socio-economic system of racial prejudice, discrimination and exploitation that was collectively promoted by colonially hungry and race/class/colour-conscious European powers (Tafari-Ama, 2006: 121).

Amy Ashwood Garvey co-founded the UNIA with Marcus Garvey and helped him to conceptualize it. She organized the inaugural meeting in 1914 and was a member of the London-based Pan-African movement. Amy was the UNIA's first secretary and a member of the management board. She co-founded its Ladies Auxiliary Wing.

In 1919 Amy Ashwood married Marcus Garvey in New York and they established the American headquarters of the UNIA there. Amy Ashwood Garvey was Garvey's chief aide and Secretary General. She was co-editor of the UNIA publication *The Negro World*. Amy was an officer of the shipping company the Black Star Line and the Negro Factories Cooperation. Her talented skills as a political activist, journalist, music producer, playwright, artist, social worker and business woman were crucial to building the UNIA into the largest international Pan-African

organization that has ever existed (Martin, 2007).

When Garvey remarried in 1922 Amy Ashwood continued to be politically active. She gave lectures internationally about Pan–Africanism, self–determination, economic independence and women’s rights. In 1924 Amy Ashwood co–founded the Nigerian Progress Union. She was a founder member of the International African Service Bureau. In 1945 Amy helped to organize the fifth Pan–African Congress in Manchester where she delivered a presentation on women’s empowerment. Amy Ashwood criticized the lack of debate about the role of the Black woman who was “shunted into the social background, to be childbearer” (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1985: 135). Between 1955 and 1958 Amy managed a restaurant in London where Pan–Africanists met.

Claudia Jones was one of the leading activists in civil rights struggles. She was a journalist, Black nationalist, feminist and communist. In the United States Claudia Jones was arrested four (4) times for her involvement in socialist campaigns. She was deported from the US and given asylum in Britain. In exile Claudia Jones continued her Black feminist activism. In 1958 Amy Ashwood Garvey worked with Claudia Jones to launch and edit *The West Indian Gazette* (WIG). It was the first anti–imperialist and anti–racist campaigning Black newspaper in Britain. It was pivotal to Jones fight for equal opportunities for Black people (Bryan, et al, 1985). Amy Ashwood assisted Claudia Jones in promoting the Notting Hill carnival in London in 1959. Jones founded the Notting Hill carnival as a showcase of Caribbean talent that would act as a bridge between cultural differences. This was an important expression of Black people’s celebration of African history and culture since enslavement. Slaves were only given one (1) day off labour a year which they used to commemorate and reconnect with their African pasts despite slaveholders’ attempts to prevent them. Amy Ashwood Garvey supported Claudia Jones in campaigns against racism in education, housing and employment (Bryan, et al, 1985).

Amy Jacques Garvey’s revelation of Marcus Garvey’s beliefs to the world is pertinent today. She was Garvey’s second wife who ironically was the bridesmaid of Amy Ashwood. She was an influential political scientist, journalist, writer, poet, orator, civil rights leader for Black and women’s liberation. Amy Jacques was the Secretary General of the UNIA. Amy was also the associate editor of *The Negro World* in Harlem that became the biggest Black owned newspaper in the world. She advocated for the empowerment of Black women in her page that was entitled “Our Women and What They Think.” Amy Jacques Garvey was a contributing editor to *The African*. It was a journal about equity for Africans that was published in Harlem. Furthermore, Mrs. Garvey was an international organizer and race leader in her own right and her discourse in words and deed were trend setting for politically inclined Black women of her day. In the cause for African Emancipation, her message was the same as her husband’s: “The hour of Black resurrection is at hand. Black man, Black woman be up and doing for self kind – for you can achieve what you will (Tafari–Ama, 2006: 109).

Amy Jacques Garvey was fundamental to helping in most aspects of Garvey’s businesses. She educated African–American people about Black consciousness, self–help and entrepreneurship. It is said that due to her revolutionary views and elevating Marcus Garvey’s work the term Garveyism should also be applied to her. Amy Jacques Garvey was mainly responsible for continuing Marcus Garvey’s legacy through her devotion to editing and the publication of three volumes of the *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. This is central to our knowledge about Garveyism and Pan–Africanism in the Diaspora. In 1944 she wrote a Memorandum Correlate of Africa, West Indies and the Americas which she sent to representatives of the United Nations urging them to adopt an African Freedom Charter. In 1963 Amy Jacques Garvey wrote her own book that was entitled *Garvey and Garveyism*. These issues are relevant today. Patricia Hill Collins states that:

Amy Jacques Garvey, wife of Marcus Garvey, not only participated in shaping the organization in his absence. Especially striking in Amy Jacques Garvey’s ideas are the connections she made between nationalism and women’s liberation movements. Despite her claim that her primary dedication was to Black liberation, she believed that Black women represented the backbone of Black nationalist struggle

### **Researching Pan–Africanism in Britain: Participants and strategies**

In order to gain an understanding of Pan–African feminism in contemporary Britain I conducted semi–structured interviews and focus groups discussions with fifty (50) Black women. Respondents discuss their experiences of unemployment, retirement, being students and workers. Interviewees’ employment in the arts, academia, psychotherapy, life coaching, creative writing, journalism, health care, community work, retail, architecture, electronics, engineering, legal and financial sectors negate racialized sexist mythology about Black women’s alleged menial capabilities. Their ages range between eighteen (18) and seventy five (75) years old. I assured participants that the data is confidential. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identities. The interviews were taped and transcribed.

We debated the importance of Pan–African feminism to their lives individually and in associations. They were born in Africa, the Caribbean, the United States and Britain. Participants were recruited from the membership of the two prominent organizations Blackfeminist.org and Sister Talk as well as a snowball sample.

These non-profit women's groups provide venues and online communities that are safe and nurturing spaces to gather in order to achieve their cultural, monetary, political and intimate goals.

Members of Blackfeminist.org and Sister Talk invited other Black women to take part in my research. Sometimes a snowball sample was created by these women who brought their friends with them and we had focus group debates. A semi-structured interview schedule allowed me to query my general interests in interviews and focus groups as well as prompt women to discuss their own. This method produced answers about the priorities of Black women and girls in Britain, Pan-African feminism, the connections between Black women's organizations in the United Kingdom, the rest of the Diaspora and Africa as well as divergent cultural, economic and political backgrounds which can undermine mutual support and teaching.

### **Pan-African feminism in contemporary Britain and the invisibility of black women's contribution to social justice**

My research reveals that Black women confront patriarchy and the lack of gender sensitivity that ignores their allegiance to Pan-African feminism in their lives individually and in organizations. Re-education that fights against racism, classism and heteronormativity is paramount. Working with Black men who support Pan-African feminism is crucial for social change locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. Rectifying legislation and social policies to meet the distinct needs of African women and girls both in individual and common terms is essential. The findings of my research project highlight the battle for the liberty of Black people; have a social and economic structure in which the white man is at the top, immediately below is the yellow man, then the brown man, and finally the Black man at the bottom. Where you have the Black mass submerged in inferiority, like the hidden portion of an iceberg, it is obvious that Black Power is not only relevant but an absolute necessity for such people (Tafari-Ama, 2006: 150).

This quote by Garvey's son, Marcus Garvey Junior, clearly demonstrates the omission of the oppression and rights of Black women by Black Nationalist male activists. There is a history of African women's progressive grassroots political mobilization in Britain that is marginalized. The silence by Western and African patriarchs that surrounds the important tradition of Black female trailblazers has existed since enslavement. Militant Black women had essential roles in the Black Power Movements organizing pressure groups, strikes, demonstrations, boycotts, sit-ins, pickets, study circles, supplementary schools, conferences and support groups. Their enthusiastic participation was reduced because often men sexually objectified them and relegated them to domestic roles. In the 1970s women were heroines in the British Black Panthers Movement that had three thousand (3000) members (Bryan, et al. 1985). Althea Jones Leconte was the leader of the British Black Panthers in the early 1970s (ibid) Some respondents reflect on how their commendable and persistent resistance to racism in immigration policies, education, housing and police brutality contributes to better lives for future generations of Black women and girls. Akehide Andrews, who has been a member of different activist groups such as the Black Panthers Movement explains that; Black women weren't just part of the history of the black power movement; they led it in Britain. A demand that emerged from the interviewees was for their equal participation in all aspects of these Black organizations. Maya, an artist said that; Amy Ashwood has got a special place in my heart. Amy Ashwood made Marcus Garvey the man he was. I think that to a certain extent her influence is wider than the UNIA. Amy Ashwood stands alone in her reference and her activities stand alone from Marcus.

### **The importance of diversity to Pan-African feminism**

*We must recognize ourselves as a global people and our ancestral ties to African women everywhere.*  
(Kes: community worker)

In contemporary Britain the mantra of the UNIA of an "Africa for the Africans" is integral to the lives of participants. They are devoted to incorporating racial, class and gender equity into the educational, financial and political progress of Black communities. Interviewees discuss the heterogeneity of Pan-African feminist theory and activism at local, regional and international levels. It examines an imaginary or 'generalized Other' and with aspects of 'otherness' within the self (Henderson, 1990: 118).

Pan-African feminism is historically and culturally specific. It is incumbent that each generation of young Pan-African feminists define themselves, their central demands and the ways that they will meet them. However, respondents agree that Pan-African feminism is based on historical and modern racialized sexist exploitation while preserving self-confidence and cultural heritage. Sasha as a lecturer asserts; I see it as an acceptance of Black women as individuals with a shared history. We have all come through the Diaspora from slavery in some way or another. We may come direct from Africa but that slavery touched everybody whether they were the ones taken from Africa or the ones left behind.

Respondents argue that Pan-African feminism entails having choices to reclaim, name and justify what freedom means to them. It withstands domination.

They maintain that it both effects and is effected by international struggles for human rights. Daisy connects left-wing political mobilization to legitimating African womanhood. She works in the financial sector and believes that; Mainstream feminism can be divisive whereas Pan-African feminism takes in the whole. My feminism is how I live my life basically and takes into consideration my creativity the beauty in femininity.

Participants are aware of ideological, social, economic and political differences among them which threatens unity and have to be defied. In Britain it is difficult to develop strategies to overthrow conservative bias, colourism, classism, religious fundamentalism, ageism, disablism and heterosexism. Research and community outreach work are integral to interrogating the originality of Black women's identities in ways that confront internalized oppression, institutionalized control mechanisms and nepotism. Understanding diversity as a source of self-acceptance and self-love is vital to refuting relationships of disadvantages and hardship. This is key to answering Audre Lorde's question, 'How do we organize around our differences, neither denying them nor blowing them up out of proportion?' (Lorde, 1988: 27)

Sometimes Pan-African feminism is criticized for being more accessible to university educated and middle class women. Hence, it is necessary to increase its mass-based appeal and make it more inclusive to addressing the majority of Black women who are working class. African women in homes, shops and social gatherings are having similar conversations to Pan-African feminists about structural inequalities but they deny the term feminism because it is regarded as being a white theory. The prevalent barrier to the comradeship of Black women is dealing with different sexual orientations. That was a main factor to some organizations closing, Sharene, a lawyer who feels vilified as a lesbian, is concerned that; In this society I think that Black women need to realize that we have so much more in common even if someone is a lesbian or goes out with a white guy. I think that a lot of energy has been used by the state and those in control to divide us and I think to a certain extent they have succeeded. We need to find our commonality and we need to come together so that we change the perception of Black women in this country because it is very fragmented. Black feminists are just not taking on and discussing the issue of sexual diversity.

At the beginning of the millennium the closure of Black women's organizations, decline in higher education and enriching popular culture due to massive cuts in the spending of governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) restricted the thriving possibilities of Pan-African feminism in Britain. Some African women are creating new places with African men that tackle the harmful power imbalances of white, patriarchal, classist and heterosexist authority; Offering most ground for hope is the evidence that some black men are developing oppositional ways of viewing black masculinity and are moving against the current trend towards the revival of traditional gender roles, signs that the 'dirty linen' argument is finally being laid to rest and the examples of white feminists moving beyond denial and guilt to a new and more inclusive politics of women's resistance (Sudbury, 1998:221).

Randi is a nurse who articulates:

I would define myself as a feminist and for me that means equality, that means anyone can be a feminist, a man or a woman if they really believe in us being equal to each other and fairness. Black British feminism is different. There is an additional level of discrimination that is happening.

According to interviewees, being a Pan-African feminist is vital to their survival in a hostile, racist, heteronormative and elitist environment in Britain that either erases or misrepresents their identities and experiences. They think that generally in British society, community campaigning, consciousness-raising, the academy or during their daily lives Pan-African feminism protects them and keeps them secure. Respondents feel unity with each other and express gratitude for their achievements collectively. bell hooks maintains that the advancement of Black communities depends upon men and women knowing systems of domination that they collaborate to dismantle. hooks asserts that; We need to hear from black men who are interrogating sexism, who are striving to create different and oppositional visions of masculinity. Their experience is the concrete practice that may influence others. Progressive black liberation struggle must take seriously feminist movement to end sexism and sexist oppression if we are to restore to ourselves, to future generations of black people, the sweet solidarity in struggle that has historically been a redemptive subversive challenge to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1991: 77).

Many respondents believe that Black men can only be allies when they adequately deal with their own personal patriarchal ideas, practices and need for healing. This is currently demonstrated in England, America and Canada where Black men and women are fighting together against racism in campaigns for reparations and Black Lives Matter. The #Say Her Name Movement compensates for male chauvinism in the internet, social media, petitions, events, vigils, national conferences, street protests and wider societal demonstrations against the killings of unarmed Black people by the police and white supremacists.

### **The racialized sexist legacies of enslavement and the global reparations movement**

The international Reparations Movement aims to make amends for the atrocities committed during the transatlantic slave trade and indigenous genocide by the present governments of the countries that were formerly engaged in it.

The Reparations Movement demands that a financial compensation is given to the descendants of those who were enslaved and who continue to suffer deprivation due to the heinous crime. It is estimated that fifteen (15) million men, women and children were shipped by European merchants to the "new world" colonies.

Slavery built the British Empire. The Royal family, the British State, the established church, most elite families and large public institutions such as banks invested in enslavement. When the slave trade was declared illegal in 1807 England was the leading industrial nation due to making more profits from enslavement than Portugal, France, Holland and Norway. In 1834 British slave owners were paid twenty (20) million pounds in compensation for their loss of human “property” in surrendering their slaves (Beckles, 2013).

The process of reparation in the Caribbean region and universally entails the obligation of a formal apology to the victims of the worst crime against humanity by the perpetrators and beneficiaries. Commitment to repair the damages in a financial settlement and to not repeat chattel slavery is demanded. Rehabilitation is necessary to tackle the repercussions of postcolonial apartheid such as psychological crisis, poverty, educational underachievement, inadequate employment opportunities, unemployment, sexual violence, sub-standard housing, inferior health, post-traumatic stress syndrome, crime and drug abuse. The British government refuses to apologize for the slave trade because of the fear of monetary requests for reparations by the descendants of the enslaved. In 2007 the British Prime Minister Tony Blair would not accept responsibility for the devastation that was caused by Britain’s involvement in slavery and colonialism. The British State would be required to pay at least 7.5 trillion pounds to compensate for the approximately 6 million enslaved people in the Caribbean for exploited labour, pain and suffering (Beckles, 2013).

Black men and women are engaged in public and official campaigns in the Caribbean, Europe and Africa to persuade governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support the Reparations Movement. Advocacy opposes attempts to silence, obscure the dehumanization and intimidate those who seek to redress the wealth as well as injuries from enslavement (Beckles, 2013). In 2017 on August 1st there was an annual march from Windrush Square in Brixton to Parliament Square. The march in London is on this day because in 1791 a brave group of Africans on the island of San Domingo fought against enslavement. It was the richest and cruelest colony in the Western hemisphere. More than one third of the Africans died within a few years of being forced to go there. Led by Toussaint L’Ouverture slaves were victorious in their battles against France, England and Spain. In January 1804 they established the first African State outside of Africa that is called Haiti.

In 2017 on August 1st, which was also Emancipation Day in Jamaica, there was a march to 10 Downing Street. The mantra of the march was “Education is Preparation for Reparation.” At the headquarters of the British government, official office and residence of the Prime Minister allies raised consciousness and demanded that the State be held accountable for rectifying the devastation of enslavement that continues in the contemporary African Diaspora. It is argued by Shumira, who is a member of the Reparations Movement, and claims that “freedom begins with the freeing of the mind and soul”. Thus, reparations entail stopping stolen resources, terrorism, trauma as well as destruction in order to achieve self-repair and gain our self-determination.

On August 23rd in 2017 there was an annual reparations conference in England about restitution and annihilating the consequences of murder and persecution in the Black holocaust. Interviewees argue that debates about reparations must explore the problems that Black women deal with. They say that Black men and women have to speak honestly to each other about the specific issues that are significant to them. Many participants maintain that while the Reparations Movement is a noble cause it is necessary to re-consider the practicality of its objectives. Most respondents think that expressing sorrow and giving payment is unlikely from British institutions that gained from the slave trade. They think that even if the Reparations Movement achieves its goals it is extremely difficult to calculate how the proceeds will be fairly distributed. This includes decisions about the sectors that require investment. For instance, what are the needs for healthcare, welfare, education, training and employment in Trinidad compared to Guyana? How much money should be given to various parts of the Caribbean and to which organizations?

Participants complain that the leaders of the Reparations Movement are men. They argue that there is a sexual division of labour that limits their access to decision-making. Thus, they state that usually Black women are expected to obey the orders of Black men. Consequently, interviewees are more willing to be involved in reparations marches rather than attending meetings that encourage female submission. They think that restitution will entail having to contend with machismo. They are worried that Black women and girls will be ostracized and not get the same benefits from reparations as Black men and boys. Some interviewees argue that in their intimate relationships Black men feel insecure because they find it difficult to be with educated and professional Black female partners. Hence, it is suggested that collaborations have to critically address unequal gender relationships in both the private and public realms when Black men overcome their patriarchal and racist bias, fears of difference and learn to respect Black women.

### **Gender and the international Black Lives Matter movement**

Since the mass migration of Black people to “the mother country” in the 1950s they have been attacked by their white counterparts with the police force ignoring, initiating or backing rampant racism. Police routinely raided the homes and clubs of Black people in Britain. There were fierce fights between police, white and Black people in the streets.

Black people were depicted as a burden to British culture. Black children and males were seen as being worthless criminals. Myths about Black women's hyper-sexuality prevented the police from investigating reports of sexual violation or investigations made women feel like they were being abused again. The Stop and Search legislation, commonly known as 'SUS' law, sanctioned victimization because police could stop, search and arrest Black people due to any suspicion (Bryan et al 1985).

In modern Britain Black people organize to surpass the barriers of the Welfare State. Black men especially are victims of racist 'stop and search' strategies. Black men and women have to protect themselves from police assaults as a matter of survival. In the United Kingdom a disproportionate amount of Black people die in police contact and custody. Black people are overrepresented in cases with the police that involve traffic fatalities, mistreatment of mental and physical health needs in detention as well as death in prison. These incidents are given less media coverage, public discourse and political analysis than institutionalized racism in the United States.

In 2012 the Black Lives Matter Movement originated in America to end racist extrajudicial murders of African-American people by the police and vigilantes whose perpetrators were never found guilty. Today similar to the drastic situation in Britain; State sanctioned power and violence is evident in racial inequality in the US criminal justice system and police misconduct. The Movement strives to end police profiling, harassment and brutality in communities, police custody and corrections officers in prisons. It affirms the life-chances, validity of the human rights of Black people and their longing for democracy. The founder of the Black Lives Matter Movement Patrisse Cullons explains:

We are not leaderless, we're leader-ful, we're trying to change the world developing a new vision for what this generation of black leaders can look like.

Several interviewees claim that the Black Lives Matter Movement neglects the suffering of Black women and girls in Britain. They describe their own experiences of police surveillance, cruelty and lack of response when they want violent men to be charged. In America this distress is investigated by the hashtag and movement #Say Her Name that was established in 2015 to attack police instigated violence against Black women as well as it being misrecognized. Black queer women and Black transgender women are more likely to be shot by the police in comparison to heterosexual females. Vulnerability to police violence is also determined by Black women's status according to their nationality, geographical location, class, age, education and disability. Vicious racism, patriarchy, elitism, disablism, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia of the State upon Black women and girls is challenged. They advocate the amelioration of the police force through campaigns to change legislation and social policies for the safety of African women and prevention of gendered racialized police surveillance. This resilience also supports bereaved families (Collins, 1998).

### **Women and the roots of rastafarianism**

A minority of my research sample are Rasta women. Garveyism is the precursor to the Rastafarian way of life. Rastafarians assert that they are the heirs to the legacy of Marcus Garvey. They perceive themselves as being Garvey's displaced and dispossessed descendants. Rastafarianism is a cultural, spiritual and political movement that reinforces African identity. The principles of radical Black consciousness, faith, equity, social justice, peace and love elevate poor African people (Tafari-Ama, 2006). The Rastafari Movement also originated in anti-colonial struggles against a global "Babylon system" of racism and class exploitation.

However, many participants maintain that Rastafari is governed by Biblically defined heteronormative knowledge, ideologies, language and social practices that repress women's autonomous agency. Thus, the man is the head of the household even if he is absent or lacks the money to be the main provider. Often Rasta men are unable to meet the criteria of hegemonic masculinity that were demolished by emasculation during enslavement and in the contemporary period by the police and security forces. Hence, patriarchal ascendancy and honour in families is essential to their manhood. Rastafarian men's belief that contraception is Western genocide and their vehement disapproval of their female partners using it is a forceful form of male control (Bryan, et al, 1985). Maureen Rowe analyses the differences between African-centric and Eurocentric patriarchal dominance of women in Rastafarianism. Rowe argues that:

African patriarchy emphasizes the power of men based on their innate masculinity and the support women give to this discourse by, in many instances, expressing their femininity through procreation. On the other hand, she explains European patriarchal discourse as being based more on materiality, with male power being emphasised through the role of the man as 'breadwinner' (Rowe, 1998: 73–74).

Rasta women rebuke patriarchal depictions of their community activism as only being subordinate and supportive. Imani-Tafari-Ama states that:

Without a doubt, Rastafari is a patriarchal movement. However, as with all social movements, Rastafari has, over the years, experienced dynamic shifts in gender power relations as a result of females revisiting their own self-definitions, juxtaposed against designations ascribed by males who created the movement (Tafari-Ama, 1998: 89).

Participants discuss how Rastafarianism was their route to Pan-African feminism. Many white and some Black people perceive Rastafari as a threat to British society and Christianity. Challenging this condemnation shapes interviewees' personal, spiritual and political journeys into radical Rastafarian unity. For them wearing dreadlocked hair is symbolic of Black power. Imani Tafari-Ama concurs that dreadlocks refute racist ideologies (Tafari-Ama, 2006). However, a few respondents refuse to remain in Pan-Africanist and Rastafarian organizations that are sexist. Karesa is a dentist who describes her discovery:

I woke up to my consciousness, my Pan-Africanness, my politics, my awareness woke up within Rastafari. It was not until I got involved with Rastafari that I was like wow I could place some of the stuff that was going on within me. Even though they exalt the Empress I am not involved because I feel it is very male dominated.

### **Personal and collective empowerment**

Pan-African feminist revolt necessitates promoting positive self-concepts, liberating consciousness and mobilizing to obtain social transformation. Therefore:

It has been argued that the single biggest challenge for feminism in the twenty first century will be the negotiation of shared political and intellectual projects within a global arena (Ali, 2007: 197).

Sade is a youth worker who wants to share her sense of belonging and purpose:

I want for my sisters what I want for myself. I have a genuine sincere need and gathering that need, the wealth of it coming to life in its fullness lends to the sisters also. I see the direct link between my growth through that, the growth of our children, the growth of our families, in order to create a balance.

Bonnie Thornton Dill argues:

When we have reached the point where the differences between us enrich our political and social action rather than divide it, we will have gone beyond the personal and will, in fact, be political enough (Dill, 1983:186).

Leslie is a life coach who perceives Black women's liberation globally:

I would do anything that I can to help a Black woman really. I think it's about us coming together and supporting each other. I think we could do more in terms of thinking about the mark we want to make on the world or the change you want to make in the world and doing something together.

Participants pave the way for other Black women and girls to be assertive and replenish their strategies. Their pride, integrity and dignity is paramount. Interviewees argue that it is essential to recognize, name and harness their own power. A few respondents believe that speaking African languages, creole and patois captures the true essence of their realities. Shanika is a journalist who claims that:

We came here and I've got to a stage in my so-called consciousness where I thought "Why am I here?" I have come to a point of understanding that journey of being removed was crucial for us on various levels to really start to see and look inwards and appreciate and to really see the value of what we have. And it takes, from the experience of those of us who moved from the continent of Africa, taken to the Caribbean, and then coming to the mother country, for us to really come into see the wholeness and connect it back. I think it's just comes quite naturally with time that we are connecting more and seeing each other.

Heidi Safia Mirza describes the necessity for Black women to subvert white, male and conservative power in Britain:

To valorize our ‘different’ experience means we have to locate that experience in materiality. Holding on to the struggle against inequality and for social justice anchors the black feminist project. For it seems whatever the project of postmodern theorizing, black women remain subject to discrimination and exclusion. Black women remain preoccupied with their struggles against low pay, ill health and incarceration, and for access to care, welfare and education. In spite of postmodernism, little has changed for the majority of black women, globally and nationally (Mirza, 1997: 20).

Joy writes blogs about self-love that indicate that there are no boundaries to Black women’s achievements:

I love and accept myself as a woman. I also love my Blackness. There is that double oppression that we face as Black women. As a Black feminist you have to be fighting against that on all levels. I think a woman comes in all shapes and forms and it is about embracing all of those. There are no limitations to who we are as women.

Rozanne is an engineer who reflects on the significance of intelligent and quick-witted Black women:

Our brightness plays a great part in our relationships with women in different parts of the world. There are some women of African descent who I love and benefit from. You are able to be whoever. Having experienced it I know that I understand who I am so much better.

Eradicating mental enslavement and rearticulating African womanhood is fundamental to deliverance. As Gaines points out,

“a jail is a jail, but the greatest imprisonment of all and, therefore, the greatest freedom, too is in your mind” (Collins, 2005: 305).

Diandra resists subordination as a healthcare worker. She states:

‘Know your specialness even when it is not acknowledged by others.’

Joy, a shop assistant who considers knowing and loving who you really are to be integral to the liberation of African women, adds:

It’s about a collective; women working in union. I think that the dynamic that we have to work against is a very strong male presence that dominates and is oppressive towards women. So, I think Black feminism comes to help counteract that. It concerns empowerment and I don’t mean being independent of men or isolating men – not at all. But it’s about creating a balance and allowing women to have a voice

Makeda is a creative writer who is enthusiastic about collective political action that reinforces the complex diversity of cultures in Africa and the Diaspora. She opined:

I think we learn from other places and other places give us hope about opportunities sometimes that certainly has an impact on your own consciousness and the consciousness of other people around you. By the same token if you think about the ways in which we complain about difficulties here, and then sometimes when you are confronted with the very real hardships that people are facing on the African Continent or in the Caribbean, to function under those same labels you just think you have no idea. There are people really struggling there. All of those parallel struggles and difficulties actually become, depending on how much of a vision you have, a part of our own sense of selves and what we hope we might accomplish or how we can better relate to people and forge our own sorts of politics.

According to Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe:

Even centuries of slavery, oppression and sexual abuse, of attacks on our culture and on our right to be, have not succeeded in breaking Black women’s spirit of resistance. Instead of distancing us from the African heritage which has sustained us, the thousands of miles we have travelled and the oceans we have crossed have simply strengthened our collective sense of self-worth. It is this firm and durable tradition of drawing strength and purpose from the culture in which our experience is grounded that is Black women’s most precious legacy to the next generation (Bryan et al 1985: 239).

### **Pan-African feminism and social transformation**

There is a movement. People are coming together and that is so beautiful to see. We are connecting. I know there are a lot of African links. There is a lot of work to do. We are thinking more internationally. The vibration is more global now for us as a community.” (Debbie, unemployed)

Pan-African feminism in Britain develops international support networks that bolster the circumstances, togetherness and re-education of women in Continental and Diasporic Africa but in a more covert manner than in the 1990's. There is a reactionary and often dangerous political climate that made several Black women's organizations go underground in Britain. Lack or cuts in funding has lessened the potential to use resources to improve the lives of Black women and girls. However, the ideals of courageous, loyal and hardworking Black women remain but the main means of communicating them are evolved by the internet. The previous large-scale resistance of non-government organizations (NGOs), marches, pickets, strikes and sit ins that defied globalized racism, heteropatriarchy and class subordination are replaced by smaller groups in a stifling regime that is less tolerant of revolt.

Assessing the manner that obstacles to Black women's advancement beyond Britain are overcome Julia Sudbury concluded:

Programmes and campaigns highlight global concerns for black, migrant and women of colour. They resist the fragmentation of black women's concerns and the artificial prioritization of one aspect of dominance over another. They speak to the need to nurture a trained, politically sophisticated and effective black women's leadership in all progressive social movements. Above all, they illustrate the interconnectedness of black women's activism in Britain and all struggles against racialised, gender and class oppression. Black women's organizations in Britain have therefore created a fundamentally holistic politics of transformation which integrates the individual and the communal, connects the local with the global and meshes the pragmatic with the visionary. It is this philosophical and ideological base which will sustain black women's activism into the next century. (Sudbury, 1998: 237)

Most of the fifty (50) Black women who I interviewed highlight their involvement in Pan-African feminist debates on twitter, blogs and Facebook that are expanded into initiatives against exploitation. A few participants perceive themselves as being part of a forceful army that defends Black womanhood in families and communities.

Hence, they are convinced that using social media effectively raises consciousness that leads to a new socio-economic and political order. Heidi Safia Mirza observes that:

What is most noticeable is how for a new generation of black British feminists, social media and new technology have changed the topography of campaigning as we knew it in the 1970s and 1980s, opening up new possibilities for transnational online feminist activism... With the opportunities to talk across geographies of time and place, black feminists are, as one young woman explained, 'harvesting our collective intelligence' in novel ways. Websites such as Blackfeminist.org and the Twitter feed #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen have opened up global conversations in a virtual 'diasporic space' (as cited in Anim-Addo, et al 2014: 130-131).

Through lectures, seminars, workshops, conferences, projects, rallies and demonstrations Pan-African feminist retaliation continues. This urgent work is combined with research on atrocities such as the sex and domestic trafficking of women and children from Africa to Europe. There is more information about the plight of women. Improving public education about babies and children being stolen from their families to slave like misery is crucial to changing legislation and social policies that reduce these horrendous crimes. Some interviewees have created their own websites that probe such issues, increase knowledge and provide positive bonds between Black women that promote solutions.

Tanya is an electrician whose website encourages Black women to share stories, expertise, advice and articles that challenge historical and contemporary myths that she hopes strengthen her readers. Tanya highlights her aims:

For me it was very important to break away from the stereotypical norms about Black women. It just helps to have the imagery and text that relates to you. Sometimes imagery is powerful.

There are comparable historical and cultural factors that connect Black women cross-culturally. However, there are also ideological, cultural, financial and legal backgrounds that influence changing identities, experiences and interests. Challenging racism and patriarchy is the foundation of our struggles for equity. Nevertheless, collaboration as intellectuals, activists, makers of social policies and amendment to laws is premised on critical awareness that entails strategic alliances with comrades who support the advancement of African women. Developing transnational coalitions that reduce poverty, racism, patriarchy and the heterosexist abuse of lesbians,

gays, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) communities is warranted.

It is incumbent that Black women and girls know that our different femininities are a source of radical renewal. We have a lot to teach each other and gain from our individual processes of self-reflection.

Many African women do not perceive how powerful we are. Historically we have harnessed our power to deal with inhumane conditions that did not seem to be surmountable. Through theorizing, consciousness raising, independence, coalitions and being accountable we continue to be victorious against oppression despite terrible situations. Pan-African feminism contributes to emancipation, justice and peace for Black women. Heidi Safia Mirza proclaims that:

I am hopeful. I am heartened by a new generation of black British feminists with their strident critiques of popular culture, global inequalities and imperialism. For me, black feminism is a stalwart tree with rich, deep roots, lovingly nurtured by a community of careful, critical gardeners. The wise embrace of its strong branches reaches out across time and space to shelter a multitude of different voices. It is why after more than thirty years, it is still 'the branch on which I sit (as cited in Anim-Addo, et al, 2014: 131)

Phenomenal African women must organize in ways that truly lead to freedom. As Bridgette, a retired therapist, asserts simultaneously with a spirit of rebellion and optimism:

I believe that within the social order you have to change people's perceptions. You have to fight all kinds of 'isms'. You have to ensure that your teachers are on the same page. You have to ensure that people know how to parent correctly. You have to ensure that journalists don't give misinformation. You're talking about social change.

## Conclusion

In Britain being Black has multiple meanings. For some women and organizations the term 'Black' is a united African and Caribbean revolutionary force against racial subordination in Britain. Diverse colonial and imperialist histories have given rise to complex notions of Blackness. 'Political Blackness' describes women whose historical backgrounds are in the African and Asian continents. Different historical, socio-economic and political experiences of racial subordination lead some ethnic groups to claim that they are Black. The notion of Black as a radical concept includes geographical, national, ethnic, cultural, generational, religious, class and gender divisions (Marshall, 2001). Pan-African feminism dismantles Western and Eurocentric social structures to offer new, self-reflective and alternative hopes for the future.

Black women are being increasingly vocal about their exclusion and misrepresentation in history. Black Liberation Movements reflect this myopia regardless of the extent of women's involvement. In the Universal Negro Association (UNIA) women served at all levels. The immense duties of Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey suggest that Garveyism could not have existed without them. The fifty (50) Black women that I interviewed who are members of Blackfeminist.org, the National Black Women's Network (NBWN) and the women who they recruited for the snowball sample demonstrate the importance of Pan-African feminism in Britain. Black men and women have to work alongside each other in equitable partnerships for the destruction of racism, heteropatriarchy and class oppression globally.

Meaningful power and social change can only be achieved when Black people realize that the commonalities in our subordination are more relevant than the differences. Research subjects' experiences in the Reparations Movement, Black Lives Matter and Rastafarianism indicate how this can be achieved on local, national, regional and international scales. Bombarded with negativity African women and girls have to deeply believe in our own self-worth for us to be empowered. High aspirations are part of imagining the future of Pan-African feminist freedom around the world. Self-determination and collaborations in Africa and her Diaspora must be unified to challenge repression.

Lauding Black women's community based activism against civil and human rights violations is fundamental. Coalition politics with Black men have to support women's equal opportunities for transformational leadership and decision-making in private and public spheres globally. Social policies for egalitarianism amongst Black men, women and children in Britain must be connected to Pan-African feminism in other countries. Opposing socio-economic crisis and austerity measures in Britain incorporates Pan-African feminist consciousness and mobilization. Organizations like Blackfeminist.org and the National Black Women's Network (NBWN) improve the circumstances of Black women and girls by preserving our power, pride, love and cultures of freedom.

This paper explores fifty (50) African women's perceptions of the negation of their activism in the United Kingdom now. Interviews and focus groups with diverse Black women and in a snowball sample, members of Blackfeminist.org and Sister Talk debate their solidarity, empowerment and transformation as Pan-African feminists. Participants fight for equity in the State, educational systems, employment spheres, housing sectors, health care and popular cultures. Across the world Black women are instrumental to the success of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), strategies against Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), initiatives to combat

climate change, interventions to eliminate poverty and Euro-American dependency in Africa and the Caribbean. Re-education and reciprocity are instrumental to achieving our dreams and plans for a different and fairer world that fosters the governance, peace and stability that are essential to outstanding Pan-African feminist revolutions.

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