



**PHD**

**Bereavement experiences in British African-Caribbean communities  
culture, social organisation and the legacy of oppression.**

Karapliagou, Alik

*Award date:*  
2014

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

### **Alternative formats**

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:  
[openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk)

Copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Access is subject to the above licence, if given. If no licence is specified above, original content in this thesis is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Any third-party copyright material present remains the property of its respective owner(s) and is licensed under its existing terms.

#### **Take down policy**

If you consider content within Bath's Research Portal to be in breach of UK law, please contact: [openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk) with the details. Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

# **Bereavement experiences in British African-Caribbean Heritage communities: Culture, social organisation and the legacy of oppression**

Aliki Karapliagou

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

2013

## **COPYRIGHT**

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with its author. This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author.

This **REDACTED** thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation.

## Abstract

This thesis explores experiences of bereavement in African-Caribbean diasporic communities in Britain. It contextualises information and findings within unequal frameworks of social organisation that have their origins in the history of slavery, colonisation, and further postcolonial experiences. Bereavement in the context of traumatically dispersed and marginal communities has been analysed by psychologists who studied the impact of trauma and/or inequality and reported complicated processes of grief. Following grounded theory analysis of data collected in interviews with people of African-Caribbean heritage in the South-West of England, I corroborated and elaborated upon findings with insights from observations and documentary sources. Experiences of grief among people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain were found to be qualitatively different due to marginality and social disenfranchisement. African-Caribbean heritage communities maintain unique understandings and attitudes towards death compounded and/or inflected by the historical legacy of loss and oppression. Despite adversity and hardship, it is through grief that participants experienced growth, social mobility, and personal/social transformation.

Cultural systems, or ‘cultures of grief’, cultivate resilient attitudes towards ‘loss’, which is a familiar and common concept articulated in African-Caribbean popular narratives. In this thesis, I also portray ‘ideal type’ social processes that facilitate bereavement’s post-loss adaptation. These processes are analysed in the context of gender and race categorisation, and unequal social organisation in Caribbean colonies and in post-migration Britain. I adopt a social constructionist approach to argue that people of African-Caribbean heritage grieve through hybridity, the multiplicity of which promotes reflexivity, resilience and growth. Experiences of loss that emanate from social disadvantage must be openly communicated and inter-subjectively negotiated in community-led frameworks of end-of-life care.

## **Acknowledgements**

The conception of the problem studied in this thesis was only possible because of the guidance and teaching of Professor Allan Kellehear. He enabled me to apply my sociological imagination in order to define what I was interested in researching. In this way, I designed an original PhD thesis that he supervised during the research design, fieldwork and analysis stage. Professor Allan Kellehear was patient enough to answer my questions, and generous enough to share with me his knowledge and insight. He has supported and trusted my skills, and to this day he provides wise advice on future career directions.

I am also indebted to Professor Tony Walter and Dr John Troyer who supervised the completion of this thesis after Professor Kellehear's departure from the University of Bath. They meticulously read draft chapters, provided constructive criticism and feedback, and most importantly were open and willing to work with a PhD in its final stages. Professor Tony Walter is immensely knowledgeable on bereavement, and Dr Troyer assisted me in approaching the subject from a cultural studies perspective drawing upon postcolonial theory. Both are approachable, understanding and influential teachers. Finally, I am grateful to Professor Glennys Howarth for giving me the opportunity to start a PhD at the University of Bath.

My family and friends, especially my grandmother Alikí Karapliagkou, Katerina Bousiakís, Lenka Banovkova, Ana Bullock, Manos Vlachos, Elena Tsonou, Noredin Mokassabi, Yiannis Michos and Dimitrios Michos have all helped me in various ways and given me moral support and advice. My dog Laki has been my companion throughout studying and writing up this thesis.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1 .....	15
Bereavement in diasporas with a history of traumatic dislocation.....	15
Introduction .....	15
Diaspora studies literature .....	22
Conclusion .....	38
Subjectivity in African-American bereavement experiences .....	40
Introduction.....	40
African-American bereavement literature .....	41
Subjectivity in studies of African-American bereavement .....	49
Rationalising death in the African-American experience .....	53
Proposed framework for the study of death in post-slavery black communities in the West	54
Conclusion .....	60
Chapter 3 .....	62
Researching bereavement in African-Caribbean communities in Britain .....	62
Introduction.....	62
Research strategy .....	63
Research design.....	68
Research tools .....	81
Data analysis.....	89
Conclusion .....	92
Introduction to the analysis.....	94
Chapter 4 .....	102
Social structure and race in slave societies .....	102
Introduction.....	102
Social organisation.....	109
Culture .....	115
Emancipation and continuing social inequality.....	129
Conclusion .....	133
Chapter 5 .....	134
Historical continuity and social change: The experience of African-Caribbean migrants in the United Kingdom, 1950-1970.....	134
Introduction.....	134

Discourse on cultural difference .....	136
The 'Windrush' narrative .....	144
Rejection as loss and trauma .....	150
Re-identification with African-Caribbean history, ancestry and culture of grief.....	153
The development of British African-Caribbean identities .....	156
Conclusion.....	164
Chapter 6.....	166
African-Caribbean culture of grief .....	166
Introduction .....	166
The attitude of acceptance .....	185
Emotionality and expression.....	193
African-Caribbean death ritual: the politics of grief .....	199
People of African-Caribbean heritage contradict their conservative approach towards the verbal expression of grief and innermost feelings with the performance of elaborate and celebratory death rituals of which they talk with enthusiasm. Whenever I invited my research participants to discuss their experiences of bereavement they would always begin with an account of African-Caribbean funerary rituals. African-Caribbean death rituals are conducive to the purpose of defying oppression, and in this way, express the generalised sentiment and political message of the community at the same time as they communicate their understandings of death and loss. They provide an avenue of communication with the wider society that would not have taken place by more direct means given the nature of race relations and competitive historical interactions.....	199
Culture of grief as resilience .....	207
Conclusion.....	218
Chapter 7.....	221
Bereavement: the experience of African-Caribbean men in Britain .....	221
Introduction .....	221
Racialised masculinities in bereavement .....	223
The male provider and protector in bereavement .....	229
British-born African-Caribbean men in bereavement .....	235
Conclusion.....	250
Chapter 8.....	253
Bereavement: the experience of African-Caribbean women in Britain.....	253
Introduction .....	253
African-Caribbean women in family and society .....	256
African-Caribbean women in bereavement.....	259
Continuing bonds .....	274
Conclusion.....	282

Chapter 9 .....	285
Resilience and social change in African-Caribbean experiences of bereavement .....	285
Introduction .....	285
Grief, growth and hybridity .....	290
Bereavement and growth.....	300
Conclusion .....	306
References .....	319
Appendix.....	394

## Introduction

*'Creativity is not a solitary moment. That is its power.'*

(Estés, 1992[2008]: 298)

*'It's not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.'*

(Charles Darwin paraphrased by Megginson, 1964)

This thesis studies experiences of bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain by considering that loss and grief may promote growth and resilience within contexts of social inequality and disadvantage. Bereavement is placed within a historical and cultural context of grief about a wider social condition and deconstructed sociologically in order to identify the role that it plays within social organisation. Social inequality and hardship in historical perspective equip people with an understanding of the concept of loss that they utilise in order to cope with life's challenges. Bereavement, I argue, facilitates cultural mechanisms of growth that take place within social encounters that involve loss and grief, by mobilising adaptive processes of (a) hybridisation and renewed identification, (b) social reorganisation, and (c) social cohesion through the practice of compassionate communication and consolation. In this respect, bereavement in the context of African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain is a social relationship conducive to social change.



British African-Caribbean heritage communities provide a unique context for the study of bereavement because their traumatic heritage rooted in slavery and historical disadvantage shape their social relationships and cultural references. This is not to recommend the conflation of African-Caribbean heritage experiences with death and mortality, nor to conceal internal diversity. African-Caribbean heritage experiences are inherently hybrid due to historical disruptions and interruptions, and for this reason, it would be a mistake to fixate or reify their properties. However, it is the same roots in diasporic hybridity<sup>1</sup> that provide the preconditions for the emergence of a culture that utilises loss and grief to reinvent communities and reorganise society through processes of identification. It would be an omission not to take this social background into consideration when we study mortality.

This research project considers the ongoing negotiations of the past in contemporary social contexts and personal experiences. It represents one narrative among many others, but it is deconstructed and its sociological relevance and usefulness is conceptualised in order to serve the purpose of studying contemporary bereavement experiences. In addition, this thesis attempts to create links between contrasting and/or complementary discourses on loss in order to sociologically theorise bereavement. It may create the impression of proposing a coherent narrative, but the author acknowledges the situated nature of those experiences and makes an attempt to deconstruct their sociological relationships in order to highlight their temporality, and at the same time, reveal their complexity and continuing influence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cultural hybridity involves the effective convergence of diverse cultural references into new definitions born out of negotiations of historical loss and trauma. Forcibly dislocated diasporas that lose their homelands and meanings are called to recreate their cultural heritage and deal with the issue of loss of historical linearity. Hybridity is the outcome of those processes and serves the purpose of connecting interrupted histories and preserving collective memory and traditions. Cultural hybridity has direct links with the notion of resilience because heritage that would have otherwise been lost is preserved in flexible adaptation in the diaspora.

Findings in the current thesis derive from the sociological theorisation of experiences of bereavement reported by research participants. Interpersonal relationships that cause grief at the time of loss are placed within a socio-historical and cultural context and interpreted with reference to it. This is because the objective of the thesis has been to provide a sociological interpretation of bereavement experiences that avoids pathological or stereotypical explanations and represents the subjectivity of minority communities. Within the bereavement literature, there is the tendency to either treat grief as a psychological problem that needs to be overcome (psychological literature) or advocate its role in promoting growth only in contextual analyses. The tendency to pathologise grief is pronounced when it comes to minority communities due to lack of adequate theorisation. However, it is within marginal communities that we need to engage in sociological analysis because loss in social inequality adds an additional, social dimension to grief and bereavement.

Sociology has attempted to contextualise bereavement experiences. However, taking social factors into consideration is different to fully engaging in analyses of social organisation in historical perspective. In this thesis, I try to identify and deconstruct the origins and history of the social relationships that influence bereavement outcomes for African-Caribbean heritage communities.

A recurrent theme within the bereavement narratives of African-Caribbean heritage participants is that grief over the loss of a person they have been related to, highlights experiences of racism and racialization. The latter makes the concept of race relevant and key in this research. Mrs Helen, for example, problematized her life in relation to incidences of direct racism that she experienced, rather than the loss of her parents to death, which she accepted. Therefore, during bereavement her grief centred upon questions about racism. The author Andrea Levy reflected upon racism in her father's life following his death, while she

reassessed their relationship and identified with a wider social condition. Other participants did not readily negotiate experiences of racism, but during bereavement they conceptualised their racialised position through the learning of history, religious practice and the development of an understanding of processes of racialization - often within a gendered framework. Race as phenotype or as a mode of social organisation (imposed by socio-historical conditions of inequality) and complicated by gendered relationships, were found to be important for participants of this research, and to affect bereavement outcomes. In this respect, race can be described as the social legacy of organisational principles developed in slave societies that affects and shapes bereavement narratives of African-Caribbean heritage participants. Loss is an integral element of racialised experiences, and related interactions facilitate understanding of processes of grief and adaptation.

In this thesis, I also deconstruct and describe cultural understandings of grief that mobilise processes of identification that lead to growth and the renegotiation of racialised relationships. I examine related experiences specifically with reference to death and bereavement rituals and analyse processes of hybrid identifications in diasporic contexts as outcomes of interactions with experiences of loss and grief. I argue that historical interactions through hybridity create the preconditions for responding to crises and counteracting vulnerability and existential threat. This is what I call a community's culture of grief, which does not mean to overidentify African-Caribbean heritage experiences with loss, but for the purposes of this thesis, it provides a useful to our understanding conceptual framework. Besides, it represents an adaptive and flexible strategy conducive to social engagement and reorganisation that challenges the essentialisms of race and ethnic categorisation.

The structure of this thesis, and more specifically, analysis of bereavement experiences in the context of popular cultural frameworks and social organisation, is grounded upon initial interview data analysis. Interview participants expressed the sentiment of acceptance of death and highlighted descriptions of their community's celebrative funeral rituals. They reiterated the importance of popular migration narratives that politicise identity, claim belonging and problematize on ethical and political grounds social exclusion. When participants talked about issues in their relationship to the deceased that troubled them during bereavement they provided evidence of patterns that I was able to interpret by referring to wider social relationships in historical perspective with roots in colonial and postcolonial unequal social contexts. These relationships were defined by efforts to racialise social structure in order to serve competitive economic advantage and political hegemony. Gender relationships completed and reinforced subordination due to the ordinary and discursive nature of associated interactions. It is those dynamics that shape the bereavement narratives offered by interview participants that guided the structure and theorisation of this thesis.

Grounded theory analysis enabled me to identify patterns within social organisation that implicate with experiences of bereavement and shape understandings of death. Political convictions concerning justice play an important role in understandings of death in African-Caribbean heritage communities, the meaning of which refers to social marginality, and the need to preserve social cohesion and promote empowerment within repeatedly interrupted lives. Literature reviews, the study of written records, visual representations, and artistic expression in historical perspective aid interpretation of evidence provided by research participants regarding their experiences of bereavement, funeralisation and death in the community. This multi-faceted approach to social research is justified by participants' bereavement processes and identifications that reflect negotiations of cultural and social relationships linked to racism and social disadvantage and promote personal and social

change. People of African-Caribbean heritage utilise implicit representations in order to express their perceptions about personal experiences and interpret social reality. For this reason, a research project interested in experiences of bereavement will not fulfil its objectives, unless it utilises diverse material and data sources to inform analysis and interpretations in the context of ethnographic participatory research design.

The narratives illustrated in this thesis are situated. They rely upon a small number of people of African-Caribbean heritage in two communities located in the South-West of England. However, the representation and analysis of the complex nature of social organisation provides confidence in the potential of research findings to initiate a valid discourse on the issues that arise with implication for policy on care and support for marginalised communities.

## **Overview**

Bereavement in this thesis is theorised as a process that promotes social change and reorganisation following loss. It is initiated by the bereaved whose grief is compounded by social inequalities and feel pressured to implement changes and adaptations in their social lives in order to cope with loss. It is also observed that bereavement is relative to how people live their lives, their interpersonal relationships and interactions, and the way in which they position themselves within the social structure. Participants in this research were affected by the same social relationships in which race and gender stereotypes play key role, but everyone interacted differently in society and was required to make different adaptations based upon their own unique circumstances.

Through sociological analysis, I was able to discern specific racialised social processes in bereavement experiences intersected by gender categories. For example, men driven by the unattainable pursuit of hegemonic masculinity were concerned with social recognition, being able to fulfil the provider and protector role within their communities and make an important social contribution for which they would be remembered, and which would grant them with access to a family of dead ancestors. Women with their intensified roles in social reproduction and care reconsidered their outlook towards life in line with more individualistic values, by incorporating their caring roles but re-evaluating and reprioritising their relationships. However, each bereavement experience was unique and depended upon each person's response to social pressures and inequalities, and how these affected their interpersonal relationships and interactions before and after bereavement. Personal and collective wellbeing are intertwined and those who respected established values fared well in bereavement because they retained the social support and community affirmation needed to implement post-loss reorganisation.

Access to an ancestral cultural repertoire with origins in slave societies supports bereavement in yet another way. Mortality and death were the one certainty that characterised life in slave societies – literally and metaphorically - and, for this reason, it was conceptualised, its relationships and roles in life were described and ritualistically utilised to transcend subordination. Such understandings - although contradictory towards modernist identifications - survived because they played a crucial role in political mobilisations for greater equality and the formulation of survival strategies in competitive contexts that reproduced social disadvantage. African-Caribbean identities are inherently hybrid and able to negotiate contradictions. They identify with Western modern and postmodern understandings, culture and social organisation, but grief complemented by representations of death help put difference into perspective, conceptualise it and assert it.

Social marginality marked by dehumanisation historically reflected African-Caribbean subjectivity that can be represented by death as a metaphor. Relevant meanings are negotiated and maintained in experiences of death and bereavement.

Funeralisation and bereavement utilise a cultural discourse that perceives the ephemerality of life and accepts loss because meaning can be constructed in alternative value systems that often connect mourners with heritage, ancestry and humanity. This is the background that prepares African-Caribbean people to behave adaptively when they experience loss. Bereavement is the type of loss that highlights those notions and historical experiences and mobilises social reorganisation and growth. I do not intend to overidentify death with African-Caribbean cultures, but to provide a narrative that will enable participants to understand and utilise their cultural resources more effectively in contexts where their subjectivity is disenfranchised.

The structure of this thesis does not necessarily represent the sequence in which findings emerged, but the way in which the argument of the thesis can be sustained and communicated to the reader. The first three chapters represent the design stage of this research and progressively move the argument from general to specific observations until problems are identified and research priorities are set. The other 4 chapters of the thesis make theoretical contributions to bereavement research in African-Caribbean heritage communities.

Chapter 1 reviews literature that examines ways in which historical trauma impacts upon bereavement. Studies largely rely upon the example of Holocaust survivors and analyse experiences from a trauma perspective. However, I argue that if we shift focus onto diasporic processes of identification through hybridity, we observe that people who experienced loss and expulsion from their homelands grow and develop in processes of bereavement through

social and cultural reorganisation. The bereavement literature has not so far provided full analysis of the sociological contexts in which bereavement experiences are embedded. In the process of exploring an unfamiliar sociological topic, communication between literatures is considered constructive, because it advances theoretical knowledge through sharing ideas and insights.

Chapter 2 looks more closely at African-American experiences of bereavement. It is acknowledged that African-American experiences are different to African-Caribbean experiences but they share in common a historical legacy rooted in slavery and social inequality. For this reason, there have been transnational influences that cross Atlantic routes, which connect black diasporic locations in the Western world. African-American experiences of bereavement are perceived as complicated by racism and social disadvantage but systematic research in an effort to deconstruct relationships is lacking in ability to represent the depth and range of experiences. A closer look at reported findings indicates that African-Americans maintain specific cultural meanings about death that saturate their bereavement experiences. I, therefore, propose an alternative paradigm to understanding bereavement that incorporates subjectivity. Such an objective is commonly served by postcolonial readings of meanings that advocate Western methods and draw from existing theories to offer different interpretations from the perspective of those who have so far been stereotypically defined. African-American studies of bereavement confirm that loss is experienced differently in the post-slavery black diaspora in the Western world. Experiences have sociological relevance and can be rationally and systematically explained should this background be taken into consideration. In this way, pathological explanations and/or cultural reductionism will be avoided.



Chapter 3 describes the methodological strategy employed to study bereavement experiences in British African-Caribbean heritage communities. In order to demonstrate how people perceive loss and the meanings they attribute to relevant experiences requires a level of abstraction that can be achieved through the cross-referencing of multiple narratives and meaningful behaviour. For this reason, I employed a multi-method approach to data collection within the framework of ethnographic research design. Interviews and observations provided specific bereavement narratives in the form of detailed case studies, but their interpretation required the study of social organisation, as well as culture. Therefore, I also employed historical and academic literature to analyse the social context in which cultural practices emerged and experiences of bereavement unfolded. Moreover, I utilised first-person accounts, fiction, poems, and visual and material culture in order to deconstruct participants' culture of grief and meanings. Grounded theory analysis of findings enabled me to combine the diversity of data and sources and identify sociological patterns within them by establishing the links between the multiple relationships represented in the data. Researching bereavement, therefore, involved a back-and-forth movement between macro and micro levels of analysis, and between abstraction and theoretical definition. Flexibility and reflexivity in the research process, as well as methodological triangulation are important in studies of complex subjective meanings. This type of research is systematic, but nonetheless, difficult to replicate, and raises ethical issues.

Chapters 4 and 5 set the sociological background that defines experiences of bereavement. More specifically, chapter 4 deconstructs slavery's social organisation and considers the impact of racism and inequality upon the inner lives of slave men and women. Social patterns created in the context of slavery determine relationships and interactions, which are directly relevant to bereavement processes because the latter depend upon the quality of relationships and peoples' place within social organisation, as I illustrate in chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 5

demonstrates how relationship patterns and inequality were historically reproduced, and justifies the argument that observations made on the basis of historical experiences are valid and constructive in the study of bereavement today. It analyses the continuing impact of stereotypes that adapted their discourse to meet the needs of the evolving colonial social organisation after emancipation. Despite progress, interruptions and discontinuities patterns of inequality persist in social organisation, and they are evidenced by post-emancipation and subsequent post-migration assertions made by African-Caribbean people themselves that nothing has changed or that history repeats itself.

In the same chapter, I proceed to interpret the loss experienced in post-migration Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s and consider the role of African-Caribbean peoples' background, historical experience, and culture in responding to that loss. Their perceptions and attitudes are profoundly affected by their more recent historical experience of loss and rejection that, at the same time, serves the purpose of sustaining, community, culture, and relationships with the past through flexible and hybrid identifications. I illustrate that hybridity in the diaspora is an identification born out of negotiations of loss that promote specific processes of social reorganisation. This observation offers important insight to further research directions explored in chapter 6, and later in chapter 9 where all the issues come together to theorise bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities.

Chapter 6 describes the cultural context that informs bereavement experiences among African-Caribbean people in Britain. Evidence is drawn from participants' bereavement accounts, as well as, from historical sources, representations and documentation of loss, death and ritual. This is not a definitive or comprehensive account. The purpose was to illustrate the narratives that saturate and enable bereavement processes that lead to growth and reorganisation. The location of the chapter in the middle of the thesis denotes a greater

level of abstraction in the content of experiences reported. It is meant to highlight popular cultural attitudes that inform bereavement experiences and the processes that sustain, negotiate and reproduce related narratives.

Chapters 7 and 8 analyse processes of bereavement among African-Caribbean participants. Case studies that indicate patterns that relate bereavement experiences to social organisation are presented and analysed. These patterns can be sociologically theorised with reference to race and gender identifications, and for this reason, I distinguish between male and female bereavement processes. In short, bereaved men realise their pursuit masculinity in communitarian and family ideals. Bereaved women pursue their individuality to diminish intensified social reproductive labour; while their outlook, attitude and priorities become effective in the practice of their care roles, including care towards the self. Masculine identifications and intensified social reproduction are products of racialised discourses, as I have indicated in chapters 4 and 5. Chapters 7 and 8 encompass analysis presented in previous chapters and represent the context where all arguments come together to explain experiences of bereavement.

Chapter 9 theorises growth, social change and its relationship to bereavement processes in African-Caribbean communities. Growth takes place in adaptive activities and strategies that represent responses to a generalised feeling of loss and social disadvantage in diasporic contexts. Growth is a directed activity facilitated by grief as a stressor and follows processes that evolve the bereaved person's relationship to social organisation. Psychology has theorised growth as the outcome of grief, but like theories that pathologise experiences of bereavement, arguments lack contextual specificity. In the final chapter of this thesis, I describe processes of social reorganisation, hybridisation and social cohesion in the context of compassionate communication and exchange, facilitated by bereavement experiences.

These processes are conducive to growth and social change and promote survival and greater representation in society. In this way, the objective to contextualise bereavement experiences and reveal their social underpinnings serves the purpose of theorising the experience sociologically by analysing an entire social system rather than isolated social relationships.

Growth and transformation are not the only bereavement outcome in African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain. Accounts on the social problems encountered reveal challenges in coping with loss and social disadvantage in adaptive ways. In this light, I would not be surprised if research findings indicated that death and bereavement exacerbate maladaptive attitudes and social problems. However, this thesis suggests that the cultural capital to initiate social reorganisation and adaptation exists and becomes functional when utilised to respond to various types of loss and grief. The thesis also goes further to study how people may utilise identification processes, social reorganisation, and community formation strategies in order to promote social change when they are being confronted by irrevocable loss that threatens their survival in an insecure context - more than it challenges their existential security.

Bereavement among people in minority status who maintain diverse identifications with roots in legacies of loss is unique. Their familiarity with the concept of death does not imply that they will not grieve, but they are more likely to resist adaptation to the changed by loss social circumstances. Existential concerns are paramount but secondary to the need to adapt, and due to social disadvantage people are accustomed to behaving in ways which prove effective in times of crisis, loss and bereavement. Functional cultural understandings of loss do promote greater awareness and appreciation of the inevitability and necessity of the experience in a context where related encounters traditionally led to social change, as well as reorganisation, maintenance and empowerment of the ethnic and diasporic community.

Repetitions of the experience in historical perspective, confirmed by loss in individual lives locate meaning in alternative value systems, which need to be discovered and conceptually defined. This is indicative of grief processes that need to be understood, described and utilised in public health policy, health services and practice, and social relationships because they have the potential to enhance social cohesion and collective wellbeing in multicultural contexts.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Bereavement in diasporas with a history of traumatic dislocation**

### **Introduction**

The first chapter of this thesis is a literature review that presents an initial attempt to explore whether bereavement in diasporas with a historical experience of forcible dislocation is defined by trauma and sustained concepts of loss. And whether concepts of loss are saturated by memories of diasporisation that reinforce ethnic categories and collective identification. My approach towards conceptualising this problem consists of theoretical synthesis and argumentation that relies upon the review of diverse disciplinary perspectives. These are either directly or indirectly discursively engaging with the topic of grief and bereavement in diasporas with heritage of loss and trauma. Admittedly, the relationship and interaction between different types of loss is significantly under-researched, although it has been confirmed as a valid research topic (Kellehear, 2002; Parkes, 1971, 1975, 1988). This literature review represents an initial attempt to theorise the relationship between experiences that share loss as common characteristic, and for this reason, it relies upon arguments that provide indicators towards a sociologically informed understanding.

In what follows, I present three sets of literature, while trying to establish a conversation between them. The trauma literature with roots in psychology theorises complicated responses to loss among people who experienced diasporisation, following traumatic dislocation and dehumanisation. These studies report intergenerational effects of trauma, mainly from an attachment perspective. In contrast, the diaspora studies literature indicates attitudes of resilience among diasporic people, explained by their hybrid identifications that reinforce flexibility and adaptation in response to hardship. Finally, the grief literature

provides a number of theories that explain loss, but lacks consideration of the effects of culture, historical experience and social organisation upon bereavement.

### **Trauma literature**

Psychological studies on the relationship between bereavement and historical experiences that involve traumatic loss focus upon direct survivors of historical trauma, and especially Holocaust survivors. They examine how persecution and dislocation impact upon and complicate later experiences of bereavement. Hart (1994: 230), for example, raises the question:

*'When trauma is itself essentially an experience of profound loss, and the bereavement itself traumatic, is it possible to differentiate, to disentangle the experiences? To address the one without the other?'*

Her answer is that the two experiences of loss and grief are interrelated because:

*'In the context of an already traumatised individual, the experience of bereavement serves to confirm other losses. For example, loss of mother would be seen as confirmation of an irretrievable loss which began with loss of motherland.'*

According to Hart, the combination of losses creates a situation of pervasive loss and heightened vulnerability because the internal and external resources are severely depleted. The individual is then more likely to experience additional and different problems in bereavement. Hart argues that such a situation creates a melancholic personality marked by a sense of 'utter hopelessness', and for the rest of her paper she describes the traumatic

emotions that often accompany loss and bereavement. She argues that anxiety, depression, psychosomatic disorders, 'survivor guilt' and other symptoms, result from survivors' inability to mourn due to the denial of loss, difficulties of reality testing, lack of containment space and supportive socio-cultural structures.

Mazor and Mendelsohn (1998) consider the spousal bereavement experiences of orphaned Holocaust child survivors and attempt to answer the following question:

*'In what way can an early and incomplete bereavement process in childhood influence later events of loss in a person's life? Are the circumstances of loss during childhood influential on bereavement processes for an adult?'*

(Mazor & Mendelsohn, 1998: 82)

They unpack the meaning of being a Holocaust child orphan and argue that when it comes to spousal bereavement in later life the 'death imprint' (Lifton, 1979) and 'compounded processes of mourning' (Krystal, 1988) evoke overwhelming affects that threaten to disorganise and destroy psychic functions. This is true even when death occurs within the 'natural order of life' because it is emotionally connected to previous losses (Mazor & Mendelsohn, 1998: 83). They conclude that there is a process of 'subtle mourning' and a 'lifelong sense of bereavement' in the experience of orphaned Holocaust child survivors, which can be confirmed and disclosed much later in life when they are confronted with the death of a spouse. Based upon their own counselling practice and experience they suggest that the task is to learn to differentiate the experiences; something which is inherently difficult because the processes of connection take place subconsciously. They employ the



metaphor of trying to ‘differentiate a black frame from a black background’ to demonstrate their argument.

David (2003) attempted to deconstruct bereavement experiences among children of Holocaust survivors who did not directly experience the traumatic historical events but are affected by a heritage of loss because they commonly had unique upbringing. They symbolised rebirth, restoration and survival (Safford, 1995), and at the same time, represented unmourned loss. They self-identify as heirs to the Holocaust and have consciously and unconsciously absorbed their parents’ experiences into worldview (Danieli, 1988). Some authors (Winnik, 1968; Bowen, 1976; Grubrich-Simitis, 1984; Pines, 1986) argued their parents’ inability to mourn displaced trauma upon them. Employing fantasy and imagination these children tried to understand what had happened to their parents (Safford, 1995), and as a result, they share their parents’ emotionality, including guilt, felt obligation to retell the story of the Holocaust, and even nightmares of persecution (David, 2003). With this background when they come to face the death of their survivor parents their bereavement is shaped by their unique understanding of death, dying and loss (David, 2003).

Current circumstances compromise recovery. They are so familiar with death, and yet they have no direct experience of it because their antecedents died during the Holocaust. Dying is, therefore, covered in mystery and they are lacking the extended family network that provides support in these occasions. Additionally, terminal illness or death makes them feel weak, helpless and anxious because ‘surviving’ is a major theme for them, and yet there is nothing they can do to avoid their parents’ dying. Familiarity with grief may promote anticipatory mourning even when their parents are not ill. David (2003) conducted a survey comparing children of Holocaust survivors with other Jewish respondents with no connection to the Holocaust, and found evidence of differences in bereavement.

Both direct and indirect survivors of historical trauma and diasporisation experience a life-long sense of mourning confirmed by death. For this reason, bereavement is complicated by a sense of futility and hopelessness, as well as lack of ability to restore existential security and meaningful life. Theorists talk about ‘intergenerational transmission of trauma’ explained in terms of the silence maintained over the terrifying experiences (Epstein, 1980; Wardi, 1992; Karpf, 1996). Adelman (1995) contends that the memory of traumatic experiences functions in unique ways (in terms of affective organisation, representation and cognition), that lead to changes in the self which provide the vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of trauma. She conducted a study on the transmission of trauma between Holocaust survivor mothers and their daughters, and argued that the memory of trauma affects the mothers’ ability to express affect. They keep silent about the Holocaust and cannot tolerate their daughters’ emotions about a past wrapped in mystery. The daughters’ ability to approach a resolution depends upon their communication of affect with their mothers. Fogelman (1998) observes that trauma is transmitted to children of Holocaust survivors because of the denied and stigmatised nature of their parents’ experiences by the societies in which they used to live, and because of the general atmosphere and unique circumstances within their immediate households. Schaverien (1998: 66) argues that:

*‘The inability of the generations directly affected to process the unprocessable meant that vestiges of the experience were transmitted unconsciously. It was known but could not be spoken about openly – the immensity of the Holocaust was too great and incomprehensible for it to be integrated.’*

Although the evidence about a connection between bereavement and trauma that occurred earlier in life focuses upon direct survivors or their children, it has been suggested that people

whose ancestral history somehow connects them to a traumatic historical past feel differently about life and death. As Secomb (2002) argues in his literary analysis of the Jewish and Australian Aboriginal literature of Kofman (1998) and Scott (1999), subsequent generations also carry the marks of trauma because grief over other fatalities in life reawakens the traumatic heritage. They maintain a special relationship with death and are bound to death by a 'surreptitious friendship', because they are products of massacres. If they choose to erase their past and history they lose their identity and become frightened and 'partially alive'. The Australian government's purposeful efforts to destroy the Aboriginal culture, language and population, and the Holocaust are events that change the meaning of history as 'description of past events', because they 'continue their work, haunting the present'.

*'If the past cannot be segregated from either the present or the future, then survivors may not be those who have escaped the fatal crucible of events, but those embodying or incarnating the gravity of those events.'*

(Secomb, 2002: 41)

Schaverien (1998) and Feldhay Brenner (2005) also employ a wider definition of the term 'survivor', and argue that grief and melancholia is intergenerationally transmitted to generations and families not directly affected because it is carried on by the 'collective unconscious'.

*'...if we remember that it was Hitler's intended aim that none should have survived, and that those who were born after the war should never have been conceived, then we see that all the Jews alive in Europe today – and those in many other parts of the world – are survivors.'*

(Schaverien, 1998: 68)

*'...the legacy of the Holocaust has become equally compelling to the biological children of survivors and to those who, in Geoffrey Hartman's words, "have adopted themselves into the family of victims". It is possible to argue that the identification with the Holocaust generation of the latter has been to a considerable extent determined by the consciousness of the totality of the Nazi decree against the Jewish people. In view of the fact that the Final Solution targeted the entire nation, every post-Holocaust Jewish child is the descendant of an accidental survivor.'*

(Feldhay Brenner, 2005: 82)

Secomb (2002), Schaverien (1998) and Feldhay Brenner (2005) did not theorise bereavement and its relationship to historical trauma in the experience of distant survivors. However, their claim that trauma is intergenerationally transmitted is suggestive of a unique way of relating to loss in terms of identifications and attitudes that emanate from it, and prescribe culturally accepted ways of responding to the experience. Most of the literature reviewed in this section draws its theoretical foundations from psychology. They report complicated experiences of loss and a web of psychological relationships that need to be deconstructed. They all agree that intergenerational grief must become conscious for the individual to cope in life, and suggest a number of avenues to this end, including art psychotherapy (Schaverien, 1998), group therapy (Fogelman, 1998; Schaverien, 1998), and reflexive and open communication (Adelman, 1995). In addition, Fogelman (1998) following the models promoted by the psychological theories of grief outlines a number of stages which survivors of trauma will go through before they 'recover'.

My aim in this chapter is to introduce an additional insight to the topic; one that will take into account the culture, history and social organisation in which these experiences occur. This is not to deny that bereavement experiences may be compounded by past trauma, but to add insights that normalise an experience that can lead to resilience. Evidence of the latter can be traced within culturally elaborated understandings of loss, which are part of the experience of traumatically dispersed diasporas, whether in their recent or ancestral historical past. Focusing upon destructive reactions to grief and bereavement is one way to look at the issue under consideration. Psychological understanding is problem-based, and concerned with 'recovery' and the individual's 'return to normality' following an emotionally unsettling experience. However, there are important indicators that resilience, empowerment and growth can be characteristic responses to loss in diasporic contexts born out of coercive dispersal.

### **Diaspora studies literature**

Fromm (2012), Nichanian (2003) and Feldhay Brenner (2005) acknowledge the psychological implications of historical trauma for direct and indirect survivors, but argue that grief mobilises a simultaneous process of healing. This is because grief represents the stressor that invites unconscious conceptualisation of the complexity of loss. Fromm (2012) explains that the descendants of survivors carry the legacy of historical trauma and feel responsible towards their community. The separation of self from the experience is emotionally painful, requires conscious understanding and the widening of perspective, but promotes healing and growth. Others (Nichanian, 2003 and Feldhay Brenner, 2005) conceptualise historical trauma as melancholia and mourning as healing, through expression in writing and other art forms.

Freud's concept of 'Melancholia' (1957[1917]) has been profitably employed by psychological accounts focused upon healing. Critics (Walter, 1999; Kellehear, 2002; Howarth, 2007) point out that inaccurate and partial interpretations of Freud's theory of grief, focus upon negative emotions and ignore the potential for growth that it creates. Nichanian (2003) and Feldhay Brenner (2005) who introduce the term as relevant in the study of diasporas with a legacy of loss, do not attempt to pathologise emotional experiences. Instead, they observe how melancholia finds expression in art and literature, and discuss the purposes that it serves. Nichanian (2003) writing about the Armenian genocide argues that the denial of the atrocities by the Turkish authorities imposed a 'generalized interdiction of mourning' upon the collective psyche that inevitably turned grief into melancholia. She defines melancholia as a numb sensation characterised by inability to mourn or conceptualise experiences and emotions, and guilt. She then looks at how melancholia expressed in novel writing has the potential to initiate mourning, and argues that 'art is mourning' (Nichanian, 2003). Feldhay Brenner (2005) also illustrates how novel writing can turn into an act of mourning and make powerful and challenging political, social and historical statements. Grief is not resolved but some form of 'mending' or 'repair' is possible.

In the postcolonial literature the idea of melancholia is also relevant, but in this context it is conceptualised as 'racial melancholia' (Eng & Han, 2003; Cheng, 2001; Luciano, 2003; Moynagh, 2008). The idea is that racialised subjects in postcolonial societies experience grief for what they can never be. It is the 'unattainable goal of whiteness' (Eng and Han, 2003) that reinforces a sense of incompleteness and internal loss (Luciano, 2003). Phenotype and difference are stigmatised and place those described in a ghostly position of invisibility. They are there but they are not accepted and their history is denied; they are disenfranchised (Cheng, 2001). However, the example of the post-slavery black subjects in Western societies also indicates how grief and loss transform into empowering hybrid identifications that

utilise flexibility and adaptive strategies to survive adversity, as well as, sentiments of inferiority. Hybrid identifications overcome social taboo, stigma and cultural boundaries by unashamedly utilising incompatible cultural constructs to create new identities that represent their experience of dislocation and repositioning into a new social order on their own terms.

According to Cheng (2001) the intergenerational memory of loss and trauma, like the memory of the dead of the Middle Passage and African slavery sustain melancholia and reinforce memory in a social context of widespread denial and disenfranchisement. Moynagh (2008) argues that postcolonial writers exhibit a melancholic response to modernity's denial to acknowledge the dead of the Middle Passage, by turning to the past in order to understand the present. Melancholia helps maintain an open relationship with the past, and this is particularly important for contemporary blacks who lack awareness of where or who they descend from because slavery represents 'a rupture in history'. Genealogy is the trauma of slavery and melancholia as a 'nascent political protest' (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003) works towards defiance of dominant forgetting. It is, therefore, a vehicle that connects with stigmatised history, leading to renewed identifications.

Tettenborn (2006) proposes an additional reason for which melancholia maintains an open relationship with the past in the postcolonial African diaspora. Unlike Freud's melancholia, postcolonial melancholia cannot transcend existing attachments, because they were already interrupted by slavery. Postcolonial melancholia serves the purpose of allowing the re-discovery and re-identification with lost ancestry and history. Postcolonial melancholia is, therefore, political rather than psychological (Eng, 2000), and it can be empowering rather than disabling if seen as a political act of resistance (Tettenborn, 2006).

Moynagh (2008) and Secomb (2002) also give us an insight into the nature of this type of melancholia, the main characteristic of which is the creation of new 'hybrid' identifications. Moynagh (2008) argues that the objective of mourning that melancholia serves in postcolonial writing is not to let-go, but to 'remember' the history that will provide mourners with an identity. However, remembering does not lead to a pure and essential identity. The outcome of postcolonial melancholia is the creation of Black hybrid culture and identity within the new world diaspora. Although, such a creation involves antimelancholic politics of memory because it leads to renewal and survival, grief is inevitable and necessary because it exposes the submerged by denial history of 'racial' terror without which the realisation of Black diaspora would not be possible. Secomb (2002) is influenced by Derrida and his idea of the 'impossibility of faithful mourning' (Derrida, 1989), when he argues that grief for a painful and traumatic history does not involve internalising those who heroically died, or simply rejecting them, and moving on. Grief in this case is about acknowledging and respecting the difference of ancestors, and negotiating the relationship between heirs and ancestors. This type of mourning involves rejection of purity and recognition of 'hybridity', and represents the healing process of separation of self from the past that Fromm (2012) described.

The process of creating hybridity as a mode of identification whilst negotiating a traumatic heritage is best explained within the diaspora studies literature. Communities which were born out of forcible dispersal and exile – 'trauma' or 'victim' diasporas as Cohen (1997) calls them – articulate and negotiate their legacy of loss in various forms of expression, in order to understand the past and reposition themselves within the world, and their new societies of settlement. Tololyan (2007: 649) argues that:



*'...a diaspora that is born of catastrophe inflicted on the collective suffers trauma and usually becomes a community to which the work of memory, commemoration, and mourning is central, shaping much of its cultural production and political commitment.'*

The 'homeland' constitutes a major theme within the diasporic cultural production and search for meaning. It constitutes a focal point around which the loss is evaluated, the past is restored, and new possibilities are explored. Initially, the homeland rhetoric revolves around the notions of 'restoration' or 'return' because it gives hope and helps sustain a collective identity in a situation of pervasive loss and grief. In time, and as diasporic communities settle in their new societies, they maintain links with the 'homeland' of their ancestors (Tololyan, 2007), but their orientation towards it changes. By re-discovering the past and evaluating their history and relationship to their homeland they create new identities. For cultural studies theorists (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Bhabha, 1990) these new identities are 'hybrid' in that they draw resource from a range of different reference points and locations. They are anti-essentialist and conscious identities that challenge the principle of homogeneity and purity that support the nationalist ideal. Hall (1990) calls them 'new ethnicities' and Werbner (1997) argues that 'hybridity' entails a discourse loaded with 'dangerous contaminations' which has turned 'insults' into 'strengths'. Hybrid identifications can be seen as acts of resistance to racism, inequality and marginality that lead to empowerment and survival in the diaspora.

Cultural production in diasporas with a significant history of loss and trauma is contradictory, and is marked by a 'dual or paradoxical nature' (Vertovec, 1997). Loss and grief go hand in hand with renewal and survival as diasporisation allows focus on both the

negative - discrimination and exclusion - and positive aspects of the experience - identification with world historical, cultural and political forces (Clifford, 1994).

*'...diasporic consciousness "makes the best of a bad situation". Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile...are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope in defining tension.'*

Clifford (1994: 312)

Diasporas turn into 'sites of creativity' (Cohen, 1997) because they respond flexibly to challenges and adapt to new circumstances through their 'double consciousness' and 'hybridity'. Vertovec (1997) argues that instead of being represented as schizophrenic deficit, 'multiplicity' is redefined as a source of adaptive strength. It allows them to express their resistance to the situations they live in, while they accommodate themselves to these conditions of vulnerability and insecurity (Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). Contemporary world diasporas also use their double consciousness to their economic and political advantage. Cohen (1997) argues that in a globalized world, the position of diasporas is particularly advantageous because they can accommodate both the global and the local, and act as a bridge between the particular and the universal. They can adopt the role of the observer, as well as, that of the participant. They can spot 'what is missing' or 'how things are done' in more than one society. In this way, they are better able to successfully position themselves in the economy and political sphere. For the same reasons, diasporic groups are over-represented in the arts, media and entertainment industries. Kotkin (1992) argued that diasporas need to have a strong identity, an advantageous occupational profile, and passion for knowledge in order to succeed.

The influence that identifications with loss through hybridity and double consciousness have upon bereavement in the context of diasporic communities has not been explored. In a literary criticism account of Jamaica Kincaid's writing, Soto-Crespo and Kincaid (2002) provide clues on the direction of the relationship. Jamaica Kincaid is a novel writer for whom different types of mourning are interconnected. In her novels she mourns individuals, a lost home, culture, history, memory and identity, all at the same time. This is because mourning and bereavement in the diaspora help establish transcultural connections already familiar to the bereaved through reflection in the process of hybridisation. Soto-Crespo and Jamaica Kincaid call this grief 'hybrid' because by mourning one loss the bereaved also mourn a larger cultural condition with which they become connected or reconnected.

For example, Jamaica Kincaid becomes connected to the West Indian context and its social needs by mourning the death of her brother who died of AIDS in the West Indies. Bereavement that involves more than one locations and cultures creates links with earlier and different types of loss. This is empowering as well as disabling because it leads to melancholia, reawakening, transcultural connections, and re-evaluation of hybrid identifications that limit as well as enhance options and choices. Two quotes from her novels *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996) and *My Brother* (1997) reveal adaptive mechanisms and possibilities for reidentification through movement of the imagination:

*'It was the time of day when all you have lost is heaviest in your mind: your mother, if you have lost her; your home, if you have lost it; the voices of people who might have loved you or who you only wish had loved you; the places in which something good, something you cannot forget, happened to you.'*

(Kincaid, 1996: 69-70)

*'I became a writer out of desperation, so when I first heard my brother was dying I was familiar with the act of saving myself: I would write about him. I would write about his dying...when I heard about my father's illness and his dying, I knew, instinctively, that to understand it, or to make an attempt to understand his dying, and not to die with him, I would write about him.'*

(Kincaid, 1997: 195-196)

It is clear in Kincaid's account that grief as part of the diasporic condition establishes processes of mourning over family and ancestry, the loss of home and homeland. This factor alone plays a role in bereavement and adds an additional dimension that does not exist in the lives of people who have not gone through loss of a safe cultural location and identity.

The way in which bereavement is experienced in diasporas with a legacy of loss and trauma constitutes a valid topic suitable for further research in search of its connections to hybrid identifications. What we do know on the basis of this literature review is that 'hybridity' features prominently as a response to the various challenges life brings in the diaspora. It is a response to the pain of loss of homeland and experiences of marginality in host societies. It helps assert the community's history and experiences and supports its members to adapt to new situations by renegotiating their identities and repositioning themselves in society, while exercising pressure for greater equality. Loss is accepted and accommodated, and identity is negotiated in response to the need to adapt and change. For this reason, it is crucial to deconstruct the social contexts in which experiences of bereavement take place and theorise the social relationships, as well as processes of identification involved.

## **Bereavement literature**

The bereavement literature provides limited insight on the problem of this thesis but describes processes that are relevant and part of the relationships I aim to deconstruct. Bereavement theories are commonly known and referred to in academic texts and journals as theories of grief. This is because in the Western world ‘grief has been overidentified with bereavement’ (Kellehear, 2002), when in actual fact, grief is a wider term that refers to reactions to loss of land, ambitions, limbs and more, including bereavement. Parkes (1971, 1975, 1988) talked about migration, unfulfilled expectations, bereavement, children deprived of their mothers, divorce, loss of loved possessions, disasters, dislocations and loss of limb as major ‘psycho-social transitions’ in a person’s life, likely to cause grief reactions. He then theorised bereavement and other grief reactions in parallel ways (Parkes, 1971, 1975). On the basis of this observation, research on the interrelationship between experiences that involve loss would be justified. However, it has not been a priority within academic constructions of bereavement.

Early developments in the bereavement literature were psychological and psychoanalytic and attempted to generalise their theories. However, the study of bereavement in traumatically dispersed diasporas requires consideration of contextual factors that psychological theories of grief often omit. Although it is unlikely that the subjective understandings and meanings – and more specifically, the extra dimension that the experience of dislocation among people deprived of the security of a safe cultural location adds to bereavement – will be represented by these theories, they, nonetheless, describe key psychological processes of grief that people experience when affected by loss. For this reason, they will be briefly mentioned in this first chapter. I will then move on to review literature that examines diversity in bereavement experiences by taking into consideration the implications and role of social and cultural factors. As I will indicate there are important

developments in bereavement research but the multiplicity of the experience and its social relationship awaits deconstruction and conceptualisation.

By concentrating upon the emotionality of bereavement (Hockey, 1996, Kellehear, 2002) psychological theories aimed at understanding the adaptive strategies of bereaved people in order to promote and reinforce their 'recovery'. There was an early approach through the lens of medicalization, where bereavement was treated as illness (Parkes, 1965a, 1965b; Lindemann, 1944; Engel, 1961; Fachingbauer, Devaul & Zisook, 1977) from which one has to quickly recover by releasing attachments to the deceased and breaking their affectional bonds (Freud, 1957[1917]; Bowlby, 1971a, 1971b, 1979, 1981; Parkes, 1972; Raphael, 1984; Worden, 1991[1982]). In this way, bereavement was 'medicalized' and 'psychologised' (Hockey, 1996, 2001; Walter, 1999). 'Recovery' through detachment was supposed to be a gradual process and the outcome of 'grief work' (Freud, 1957[1917]; Lindemann, 1944; Bowlby, 1971a, 1971b, 1981; Parkes, 1988; Parkes and Weiss, 1983; Osterweis, Solomon & Green, 1984). The grief work hypothesis has now been accepted and defined by Stroebe (1993: 19-20) as

*'a cognitive process of confronting loss, of going over the events before and at the time of death, of focusing on memories and working towards detachment from the deceased. It requires an active, ongoing, effortful attempt to come to terms with loss. Fundamental to current conceptions is the view that one needs to bring the reality of loss into one's awareness as much as possible and that suppression is a pathological phenomenon.'*

In order to frame and capture the process of grief work, in order to rationalize it and make it systematic and manageable, and therefore suitable for counselling and therapy, some

theorists constructed 'stage', 'phase' or 'task' models of grief (Averill, 1968, Bowlby, 1971a, 1971b, 1981; Parkes, 1972; Worden, 1991[1982]; Raphael, 1984; Rando, 1993). According to these models a bereaved person will typically be numb at the outset and deny the reality of the loss. These emotions are then followed by yearning, anger and depression. The final stage is 'detachment' and the relinquishing of bonds to the deceased. In popular discourse this is known as 'letting-go' and 'moving-on' (Walter, 1999; Valentine, 2006). Wherever grief does not follow this course, it is considered 'pathological' (Lindemann, 1944; Parkes, 1965a).

The stage theories of grief had a profound influence upon bereavement counselling practice, or the 'discipline of the therapeutic' (Small, 2001). They have been heavily criticised, but Maciejewski et al., (2007) argue that the stage model remains 'a widely accepted model of bereavement adjustment still taught in medical schools, espoused by physicians, and applied in diverse contexts'. Maciejewski and colleagues (2007) carried out the Yale Bereavement Study in order to test and empirically examine the stage theories. Their findings indicate that acceptance rather than disbelief is the most frequent initial grief indicator, with yearning being the dominant negative post-loss emotion. However, after rescaling the grief indicators they found that they peak in the sequence proposed by the stage theory and concluded that their study found empirical support for stage models of grief.

Small (2001) suggests that there are people that do not experience grief in the sequence indicated by stage theories, but their acontextual nature made them susceptible to easy translation into prescriptive devices in the hands of bereavement counsellors and carers. As a consequence, bereaved clients were expected to progress through the stages, and if they deviated from the expected trajectory, they were considered pathological cases (Howarth, 2007). Samarel (1995) goes as far as to claim that some practitioners abused the theories and

forced their clients to move from one stage to the next. This is despite stage theorists' claims that their suggestions were indicative, and warnings against their rigid interpretation (Walter, 1999, Valentine, 2006). The Kubler-Ross study *On Death and Dying* (1969) was never intended to be a grief and bereavement study but one on death and dying, and the author clearly described the 'stage theory' as a heuristic device (Kellehear, 2008). In 2005 Kubler-Ross and Kessler published a book on bereavement in which they do describe five stages of grief, but the content of the book is much wider in scope, as they pay particular attention upon continuing communications between the bereaved and the deceased.

As a result of misguided interpretations, the practical application of stage theories obscured variety and diversity in grief reactions (Wortman & Silver, 1989). Misunderstandings owe to psychological theories' failure to reflect upon the social and contextual factors that interact with bereavement. Weiner (2007) commented that the Yale study cannot claim to describe 'normal' bereavement, on the basis that they failed to take into consideration personal, cultural and social circumstances that implicate with bereavement and affect its course.

Theories of grief cannot adequately explain bereavement in diasporas with a significant heritage of loss because they do not take into consideration their history, social context, culture and relationships that shape their bereavement and make it unique. In order to theorise this social relationship we need to normalise bereavement and shift our focus from the disruptive properties to its role within social change and organisation. This is an objective pursued by theorists with a sociological approach to bereavement. However, as a newcomer to the area of grief and bereavement, sociology offers useful insights, but has not fully explored the variety of experiences in different contexts. Within a sociological approach, bereavement theories can be used as tools or heuristic devices but the details of each context need to be defined and fully analysed.



I will demonstrate here why there is need to be flexible with the utilisation of bereavement theories and study the particular social circumstances of each case when we consider their application. I will attempt this with reference to bereavement theories on ethnic diversity. The scope of diversity which has been explored within the bereavement literature is considerably limited. Early attempts focused upon the confirmation of the ‘universality’ of grief hypothesis within the diversity of emotional expression and ritual practices around the world (Rosenblatt, Walsh & Jackson, 1976; Eisenbruch, 1984a & b; and Parkes, Laungani & Young, 1997). In their cross-cultural research Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson (1976: 124) studied grief reactions in 78 cultures using the ethnographic method and concluded that

*‘...American practices and behaviours are a relatively safe base from which to generalize about the species.’*

Subsequent studies focused upon a limited conceptualisation of culture and attempted to produce descriptive ‘cultural factfiles’ (Gunaratnam, 1997) of death practices in different ethnic and religious minorities (Firth, 1996, 1997, 2000a&b; Katz, 2000; Irish, 1997; Kalsi, 1996). Other research (Field, Hockey and Small, 1997; Irish, Lundquist and Nelsen, 1993) with a sociological or anthropological approach to the problem of diversity in bereavement represent a shift of perspective and make a clear effort to take into consideration social and contextual factors. However, as I have already suggested, we need to theorise social organisation in modern and postmodern contexts on a macro and micro scale, in order to be able to make useful comments about the experience and interpret the role of social factors. This is a direction set by McManners (1985) in his study of changing attitudes towards death and dying in 18th century France where despite pressures to comply with trends set by a progressively medicalised culture, care for the dying and bereaved remained dependent

upon poverty that encouraged adaptive cultural creativity in responses to loss. McManners advises us to position end-of-life care within political, economic, and social structures, and within a historical context.

Walter (1999) in his book *On Bereavement: The Culture of Grief* explored bereavement in postmodern societies theorising related sociological relationships. In this way, he provides guidance and opens an avenue of communication with theorists interested in undertaking situated research studies. Research on bereavement will benefit by considering how culture, society and history interact with our responses to loss. Any context-based research needs to be placed within a larger social framework. Without such considerations, sociological theories on bereavement risk proposing alternative frameworks to be applied indiscriminately to all bereavement experiences (Small, 2001). Without contextual information sociological theories of bereavement are compromised by the limitations of their own models and frameworks. This is especially the case when the expectation is to verbalise experiences of loss in the process of on-going communications with the deceased. Strange (2005) highlighted that poverty in Victorian England prescribed adaptive responses to loss that were misunderstood in the literature of the middle classes for lack of emotional expression. Similarly, Scheper-Hughes (1993) in her ethnographic study of attitudes towards mothering among impoverished communities in Brazil, reveals alternative meanings shaped by socio-economic disadvantage. By Western standards, these practices and attitudes towards the loss of infants may be conceptualised as neglectful.

In the United States, Rosenblatt and Wallace (2005a&b) researched the implications of the racialised position of African-Americans upon their experiences of bereavement. They contributed two major findings: (a) that racism affects life chances, mortality and, therefore, bereavement processes, and (b) that culture, possibly related to the historical experience of

slavery, determines African-American responses to loss. They provided significant insight into the subjective experiences of their participants but the analytical value of their research is undermined by their focus upon contextual inequality, and lack of conceptualisation of modernist modes of social organisation that constructed inequality in the first place. For this reason, they only succeed in demonstrating their first finding, and fail to position the case study into a wider framework of modern social organisation. Analysis of social organisation would have been important here, because within lives experienced as loss, collective efforts to respond to the issues that arise create a cultural background that shapes bereavement. The latter would have indicated ways in which African-Americans subjectively perceive loss, survive and even grow from the experience.

Bereavement theories, like the theory of disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989), continuing bonds theory (Klass, Silverman and Nickman, 1996; Walter, 1996; Valentine, 2008) and the dual process model of grief (Stroebe and Schut, 1999) that take into consideration social factors in bereavement provide limited sociological explanation when not studied within a framework of social organisation. Research on bereavement now studies identity, the meaning-making processes that accompanies loss, and the continuing bonds that bereaved people maintain with the deceased when confronted with existential questions (Valentine 2008; Neimeyer et al., 2006; Klass et al., 1996; Walter, 1996). However, research on Western experiences fails to problematise the socio-cultural context within which observed experiences unfold. Meaning-making processes are recognised as personal choice and interpreted within the context of life narratives. The study of bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities is similarly interested in a perceived lack of coherence of an existential self, due to historical trauma and dispossession. However, the focus upon a marginal community affected by social disadvantage questions the social structures responsible for creating the preconditions for loss.

For example, we can theorise that diasporic people burdened by a heritage of loss and trauma experience the emotional weight of multiple losses subconsciously. They feel guilty because they do not understand the origin of their pain and for grieving differently, and in a way that the wider society does not understand. Their grief is socially unwarranted because the traumatic experiences of their ancestors are historically denied or silenced in society. They are, therefore, likely to live with a sense of disenfranchisement and disconnection from their social environment. The latter explains the observation of melancholia in diasporic contexts. However, as we have seen in the previous section, there is creativity and cultural adaptation as well as hybrid identifications that relate to loss. In this context, the study of social organisation would aid us in interpreting peoples' motivation to recreate their social existence in ways that support their inclusion. In this framework, we can more effectively theorise social change and consider the role that mortality plays in it.

Klass and Goss (2002) argue that continuing bonds with ancestors and conversations with the dead may be part of the grief of homeless and oppressed groups. They refer to those who identify themselves as descendants of slaves, women, and Israelis as more likely to have political motives to communicate with the dead, as part of a process of emancipation and empowerment. Negotiating the past to establish its continuity with the present and the future when this has been interrupted by an irrevocable loss promotes continuing bonds and complicates grief. However, the complexity of this process has not been deconstructed. The continuing bonds theories have described such experiences, but their theorisations have yet to emphasise and analyse the dynamic nature of bereavement by taking into consideration structural and cultural factors in the lives and communities of the bereaved.

The literature reviewed in this chapter does not point to the conclusion that people who have been dispossessed in their historical past fixate upon grief. As Stroebe and Schut (1999) describe in the dual process model of grief, they may oscillate between grief and adaptation. Depending upon their place within social organisation, cultural background and historical experience, they seem to utilise grief, disenfranchisement and continuing bonds as resources to facilitate change. Bereavement as the process of social adaptation to loss does not exclusively refer to grief reactions. For this purpose, the analysis of social organisation is paramount to deconstructing how loss is responsible for creating a social legacy evidenced in advocacy, political activism, foundations and careers (Kellehear, 2002). In this context, it is legitimate to ask what may be the role of bereavement in promoting adaptation and social change, and how end-of-life care organisation and death rituals may mobilise wider social processes?

## **Conclusion**

The problem debated in this literature review – the possibility that a historical legacy of loss and trauma shapes grief and bereavement in the lives of survivors in the diaspora - has not been sufficiently theorised. For this reason, I initiated a conversation between diverse sets of literature that help us to explain the relationship. Each set of literature has certain goals which stem from their epistemological underpinnings. The psychological studies of the trauma and bereavement literature focus upon the painful emotions and ‘pathological’ reactions to grief and bereavement and look for methods that reinforce ‘recovery’. They concentrate upon the individual isolated from the socio-historical and cultural context in which their experiences take place. Their approach is modernist in that they guide the bereaved through a structured and predictable process that leads to the severing of their

bonds to the deceased in order to return to normal functioning within a progress oriented society.

Cultural studies and sociology explore the contexts and social relationships in which bereavement takes place but in the case of the former bereavement is absent, while in the latter accounts are largely Eurocentric and remain person-focused. In researching bereavement in diasporisations by traumatic means it would be beneficial to focus upon the descriptions of cultures of grief, positioned within a wider sociological framework of social organisation. The effort will involve consideration of the socio-historical and cultural contexts where identifications are embedded, and their deconstruction and sociological conceptualisation. Bereaved people in the diaspora have gone through multiple experiences of loss and they are not unfamiliar with mortality. Depending upon the ways in which they identify through hybridity within their structural position they will respond to loss to facilitate processes of readjustment and adaptation.

## Chapter 2

### Subjectivity in African-American bereavement experiences

#### Introduction

To add insight into the mostly theoretical discourse elaborated in chapter 1, I will now develop a critique of the empirical studies that analyse bereavement in African-American communities. These studies do not explore the interplay between bereavement and a culture of loss, but they provide us with the necessary information to begin theorising such a relationship; or at least to establish that there is a connection worth exploring further and consider ways in which this can be accomplished effectively and productively.

African-American experiences are different to African-Caribbean heritage experiences in Britain, which are yet different to African-Caribbean experiences in ‘the West Indies’. However, the three locations constitute the key reference points of the Black Transatlantic diaspora that engage in transnational networking and relationships (Vertovec, 2002). Paul Gilroy (1993) who coined the term *Black Atlantic* argues that transatlantic relationships keep the locations of the black presence connected in the Western world, in the form of shared postcolonial diasporic identities, political movements and economic interdependency. In particular, Gilroy (1993) discusses how American, British and Caribbean Black diasporic cultures shape each other, as well as the metropolitan European cultures with which they interacted through intellectual and political cross-fertilisations that resulted from migrations (voluntary and involuntary), as well as, participation in common struggles towards emancipation, autonomy and citizenship. The result is the creation of distinct ‘hybrid’ identities - ‘a transnational formation’ (Gilroy, 1993: ix) that requires new conceptual tools of interpretation. My research interest lies within the British African-Caribbean heritage

diaspora, but research in this area is considerably limited. Given the affiliations between the various Anglophone locations of the Black Atlantic diaspora it would be wise to examine reported experiences among African-American counterparts.

Studies on African-American grief and experiences of bereavement theories are shaped by a Western discourse on what constitutes psychological wellbeing. Black subjectivity may be inherently different according to indicators considered in chapter 1, and additional ones explored here. Our incomplete conceptualisations may be attributed to failure to discern reason in alternative responses to loss shaped by historically reproduced forms of hardship. Instead, our approaches to interpretation unwittingly reify culture. The current thesis engages in an effort to facilitate conversation, interpret black subjectivity and identify underlying motivations of expression. This second literature review complements the argumentation of the preceding chapter by providing further evidence of adaptive responses to loss that can be linked to African-American identifications with historical trauma and experiences of coping in marginality. In this progressive manner we can begin to understand how and what mobilises and facilitates processes of adaptation.

### **African-American bereavement literature**

The traumatic historical legacy and culture of loss is rarely taken into consideration in studies that theorise bereavement in black experiences. Even when there is evidence of cultural carryovers from the past to the present in attitudes towards death and funerary rituals, theorisations do not go beyond descriptions. At the most, they attribute difference to racism, like in the study by Rosenblatt and Wallace (2005a&b). However, it is important to take into consideration and deconstruct the relationship between a culture of loss and bereavement, because slavery, death and the memory of the dead have shaped black cosmologies,



understandings and experiences in the Black Transatlantic diaspora throughout history. In the contemporary world, death rituals and attitudes towards death provide stark examples of cultural carryovers and continuities which can be more profitably explained by the existence of a legacy and culture of loss, nurtured by persistent inequalities in the postcolonial world. Death customs and bereavement in the Western world black diaspora are better seen as political, meaningful and calculated acts of defiance in the face of adversity. Traditional meanings of death and bereavement practices and customs have continuing relevance and take renewed significance in contemporary societies because they serve political purposes. This is what I will demonstrate by the end of this literature review and in the analytical chapters of this thesis.

First, I will critique bereavement studies that rely upon Western assumptions and frameworks in order to study bereavement in the black experience. The academic disciplines in which these interpretative frameworks are rooted were shaped by a colonial discourse that attributes difference to culture. The latter reflects upon the ability of those paradigms to perceive the experience of death and bereavement among black people as rational. This is not to suggest that bereavement theory is racist, but to address the shortcomings of its epistemological origins and overcome them.

In Britain, Higginson and Koffman (2003), Koffman and Higginson (2004) and Koffman and colleagues (2008) studied palliative care experiences among people of African-Caribbean heritage. Although their findings are not about bereavement per se, they provide initial insights into the community's understanding of death and dying. Higginson and Koffman (2003) found that people of African-Caribbean heritage are death accepting, and attribute this tendency to their strong religiosity. Koffman and colleagues (2008) further explored the role that religion plays in their coping styles and compared outcomes to white

patients. The former fared better and remained positive at the end of life. Participants also reported experiences of hardship and racism throughout their lives that helped them to gain a perspective on life's challenges. Beliefs in God complemented the worldview they gained through life and enhanced its significance by elaborating it with spiritual interpretations. Cancer was another challenge that they faced stoically with courage and acceptance. The authors did not explain these findings. They treated religion as a 'constant', a 'social fact' in a Durkheimian (1947[2010]) sense that shapes peoples' behaviour and ignored the ways in which people dynamically construct spirituality according to their life situations. In this sense, these studies are limited by cultural (religious) reductionism.

African-American studies are more in volume, but are limited in similar ways. Consensus within the African American bereavement literature has it that grief is experienced differently in this segment of the United States population (Perry, 1993; Barrett & Heller, 2002; Fitzpatrick & Tran, 2002; Ellis & Granger, 2002; Smith, 2002; Rogers, 2004; Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2005a&b; Goldsmith et al., 2008; Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008; Burke et al., 2010). Laurie and Neimeyer (2008) title their paper *African Americans in bereavement: Grief as a function of ethnicity* in an attempt to highlight the importance of ethnicity in shaping bereavement experiences. Studies like the one by Ellis and Granger (2002), Goldsmith et al. (2008), Laurie and Neimeyer (2008) and Burke et al. (2010) construct quantitative research designs and employ psychometric tests to measure concepts such as complicated grief within the African-American population. They conclude that there are higher rates of complicated grief among African-Americans and engage in attempts to contemplate upon the reasons for these findings.

Burke, Neimeyer and McDewitt-Murphy (2010) researched African-American homicide bereavement under the rationale that homicidal death leads to 'heart-wrenching grief' (2010:

61), and there are higher levels of such deaths in this population (*see Kochanek, Murphy, Anderson & Scott cited in Burke, Neimeyer and McDewitt-Murphy, 2010: 2*). They found higher levels of complicated grief, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. At this point, the authors led by the assumption that African-American culture favours communitarianism went on to investigate whether family and social networks play a role in bereavement; something which they could not correlate. This may be because culture is not immune to taboo, denial and ‘disenfranchisement’ (Doka, 2002) and homicidal death may provoke such societal and community reactions. In addition, there is often the misconception that ethnic minority groups are served and supported by strong family and kin networks; something that does not always reflect the reality experienced (Smaje & Field, 1997). In Britain there is evidence suggesting that such ties are breaking down both in Asian and African-Caribbean heritage communities often creating friction and conflict within families (*see Coombe, Shabira Moledina, Barker, and Farrah, cited in Atkin and Rollings, 1992: 410*). Cohesion and community can indeed support bereavement care. However, they cannot compensate for social inequality, and it would be misguided to assume that coping is the outcome of inherent cultural attributes.

Ellis and Granger (2002) also reported high levels of prolonged grief disorder among African-American adults who experienced parental loss during adolescence, and Goldsmith et al (2008) made similar observations which they attributed to exposure to adversity during childhood and insecure attachment styles associated with abuse and neglect. The methodologies employed in these psychometric studies do not permit elaborate and explanatory accounts that shed light into the contextual backgrounds that explain the problems that participants experience. It is not clear - although it is implied at times – that it is racism, exclusion, marginality, discrimination and a history of persistent inequalities that create the social structures within which bereavement is lived and experienced. Lack of

adequate understanding and appreciation of the situation, may lead to unnecessary pathological explanations, or careless claims that find in ethnic minorities a ‘cultural deficit’ (Gunaratnam, 1997), responsible for complicated grief. Goldsmith et al. (2008), for example, use language that can easily be manipulated to argue that poor bereavement outcomes are related to problems within the African-American communities for which they, themselves, are solely responsible. Such an approach can be consequential. In the US Kennedy and colleagues (*see Chakraborty and McKenzie, 2002*) reported a dose-response relationship between the level of racial disrespect (the belief that the plight of African-Americans is their own fault) and levels of mortality in African-Americans.

Western devices that measure psychopathology cannot be unproblematically applied to non-Western populations without reducing the cause of their problems to innate pathology or cultural determinism. This is because as Said (1979[2003]) has pointed out, Western scientific disciplines like philosophy, psychology and psychiatry were formulated during colonialism and were shaped by a discourse that constructed ‘Others’ as inferior. They, therefore, tend not to discern rationality in difference, but merely see ‘Others’ as cultured and expressive. Psychometric devices run greater risk of repeating long-term stereotypes because they do not provide the opportunity to explore subjective meanings. For the same reason, Chakraborty and McKenzie (2002) questioned the validity of European mental illness models in ethnic minority groups; and Mclean, Campbell and Cornish (2003) carried out a qualitative study on the use of mental health services by people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain and found that mental health is differently experienced and defined. As a consequence of strict reliance upon Western conceptions of mental health, symptoms are misdiagnosed by mental health practitioners. Theorists across the Atlantic, and especially so in the United States are limited by under-developed scientific frameworks. The latter significantly compromises the explanatory potential of our work.

However, the psychometric devices measuring ‘complicated grief’ and other symptoms of bereavement provide a good starting point to a discourse that requires further exploration and complex reasoning. They indicate that there are additional problems in bereavement experiences of black people in the West. Grief is compounded by racism and social problems – the outcome of long-term marginalisation. The notion of ‘complicated grief’ developed by Prigerson and colleagues (1995) who distinguished grief psychopathology from depression and devised an inventory to measure it, is therefore effective in identifying general trends but used alone it lacks explanatory value. It needs to be complemented by analysis that takes into consideration historical trends in social organisation.

Qualitative studies on African-American grief are equally compromised by their reliance upon Western frameworks of understanding grief. Lacking firm epistemological foundations, they seem to be torn and unable to explain contradictions. For example, Smith (2002) and Rogers (2004) by seeing bereavement as a ‘pathological’ experience that interrupts and disrupts ‘normal’ functioning and needs to be brought under ‘control’, omitted or partially reflected upon findings that indicated positive reactions and resilience. On the other hand, Fitzpatrick and Tran (2002) reported healthy grieving patterns among African-Americans. Following Walker’s suggestion (*see Fitzpatrick and Tran, 2002: 78*) that death is more acceptable and natural among African-Americans, they studied the relationship between bereavement and health outcomes and found that bereaved African-Americans grieve in ways less detrimental to their health compared to white people. Salahu-Din (1996) also claimed that African-American widows experience high levels of growth, renewed confidence and self-esteem after the death of their spouse. Kin networks and families were found to play an important role in supporting the bereaved during their time of grief in both studies.

Despite positive outcomes following loss and bereavement, it would be naïve to treat these findings unproblematically. Such an approach represents the opposite end of the spectrum from reading pathology in black peoples' responses to loss. Within a more balanced conceptualisation, we could argue that people have found ways to come to terms with hardship and loss; a skill that they learned through adaptation to life and experience in racialised contexts. Community and family can support coping, but the reason that they play such a role in the first place is because of their functionality in serving survival purposes in contexts of marginalisation and social exclusion. The latter makes it all the more necessary to engage with their experience in a manner that includes black subjectivity.

Qualitative African-American studies are limited by simplistic conceptualisations of religion, family and community in their interpretations of bereavement outcomes. Laurie and Neimeyer (2008) found that African-Americans are more likely than white Americans to maintain continuing bonds with the deceased and they attribute their finding to higher levels of religiosity. Smith (2002) concluded that religion plays the most important role in the lives of grieving African-American daughters in that it helps them to progress through the stages of grief and find consolation and resolution in establishing continuing bonds with their deceased mothers. In this way, she put together the assumption about the presence of strong religiosity among black people with the expectation that people ordinarily progress through stages of grief and the continuing bonds hypothesis to argue, with no substantial evidence, that African-American daughters experience 'normal' grief reactions.

Another study by Marwaha and Livingston (2002) employs a rigid conceptualisation of religion, and as a consequence of failing to identify and analyse the meanings that participants attach to it, they provide simplistic interpretations of behaviour which run the

risk of portraying them as superstitious. For black people in the Western world, religion is part of a wider struggle for justice and emancipation which started during the late years of slavery (Craton, 1997; Walvin, 2001). Seeing life as struggle is part of the black subjectivity worldview in the Western world (Sullivan, 1995), and religion is accommodated to serve such a narrative. Not seeking help in mental health services denotes acceptance of life as a struggle, and religion and God, sanction such a response with their representations of 'futility' and 'timeliness', in the sense that 'life is unpredictable despite our attempts to affect it' (Sullivan, 1995: 161). Avoidance of mental health services (Laurie and Meimeyer, 2008 and Burke et al., 2010), with all its consequences and a preference for family support and spirituality (Laurie and Neimeyer, 2008; Burke et al., 2010), can be more productively explained in terms of lack of trust in society and tensions in race relations.

The issue with African-American theories of bereavement is twofold. Firstly, within a modernist paradigm, they aim to introduce black subjectivity into a mainstream bereavement discourse and promote the adoption of a therapeutic approach. However, in their efforts to serve Western values and ideals of progress, they fail to perceive the unique needs of ethnic minority diasporic communities. The history of colonialism and slavery do not sit comfortably within the Western narrative about modernity, progress and development. For this reason, we may be unwittingly resisting to accommodate intelligence that involves recognition of limits in what we already know. Secondly, and as an extension to the first point, we are conveniently positioned within the acknowledgement of cultural explanations when it comes to difference in bereavement. Whether this is to pathologise or to celebrate a culture for its adaptive strength, the approach is similarly undermined by lack of recognition of subjectivity and motivation within diverse responses to loss.

## **Subjectivity in studies of African-American bereavement**

Early theories supported the universality of grief thesis. Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson carried out large-scale cross-cultural research in 1976 and concluded that “...*American practices and behaviours are a relatively safe base from which to generalize about the species*” (1976: 124). Theorists believed that grief is universal, but is expressed differently around the world (Eisenbruch, 1984a & b; and Parkes, Laungani & Young, 1997). Recently, Rosenblatt changed his position and with Wallace (2005a & b) researched the implications of the racialised position of African-Americans upon experiences of bereavement, arguing that for marginal communities bereavement is qualitatively different. They found that African-Americans feel anger, resentment and guilt when a loved one dies because racism and discrimination cause poverty, health inequalities and shorter life expectancy, and the death is often untimely and traumatic. The authors placed emphasis upon the material and structural conditions of African-American life and its relationship to bereavement and concluded that the latter is often compounded as a result of racism.

In their research, Rosenblatt and Wallace (2005a&b) also revealed that death and bereavement in the black community is connected to the trauma of slavery but did not go further to conceptualise the relationship between the legacy of loss and bereavement. They just argued that narratives that have their roots in slavery and perceive death as homecoming and freedom from the trials of life are reflected upon present behaviours and discourses; death is seen as liberation from oppression and inequality. Speculation into the origins of African-American cosmological understandings and death belief systems and consideration upon continuing patterns of disadvantage would shed some light upon the subjective meanings of reported experiences and rationalise them.



Africentric accounts explain contemporary deathways among African-Americans in terms of the continuing influence of African traditions maintained in contexts of inequality in the practice of funerary rituals. Specifically, death in African-American communities is seen as linear progression of life, and the two worlds are interconnected. The centrality of this belief system lies partly in its African origins, but mainly in its relevance and functionality in the present unequal world. Viewing human existence from a holistic perspective that includes death helps African-Americans cope with grief, which is frequent and sometimes traumatic. Hardship does not strip them off emotionality. Rather, hardship and recurrent loss makes them more resilient and accepting of life as it comes. They grieve and experience emotional pain, but know that life comes in cycles of beginnings and endings (Estés, 1992[2008]) of which they have limited control. For this reason, since slavery they employed the resources of their African heritage in order to cope with the challenges that life presented them with in the New World.

The prevalence of death in the African-American experience breaks the boundaries between life and death and creates unique relationships of compassion, support and solidarity within black communities. Barrett (1998) and Barrett and Heller (2002) traced the origins of African-American death and dying traditions in West Africa and provide an insider's interpretation of the customs Barrett observed since he was a child in his community that stood in direct contrast to those of the majority population. What impressed him most was that as soon as someone in his community died, everyone had to go and support the bereaved family and make offerings of help and food in a situation that they treated as urgent and sacred. He then goes on to outline some characteristics which he believes are observable within the totality of the black experience in the Western world. African-Americans are:

1. 'death accepting' because they view death as a part of the natural rhythm of life;

2. position themselves against euthanasia;
3. regard death, dying and the dead with great reverence and respect;
4. regard funerals as primary rituals in which they invest greatly according to their tradition and protocol;
5. attendance at funerals represents an important social obligation;
6. prefer ground burial;
7. believe in life after death and the notion that individuals transition into the spirit world;
8. acknowledge the existence of dead ancestors within their community, through the spirit world, and
9. engage in rituals to honour the dead.

The functionality of death in finding meaning in oppression is represented by the continuity between life and death, expressed in language such as 'passing over', 'pass on' and 'making a transition' from the material world to the spiritual (Sullivan, 1995: 162); and in the metaphors of 'Going Home to Guinea', 'return to the Mother' where Africa is represented as the Mother, or more recently the metaphor of the 'River' and 'Water' which carry and sail across, as part of the transition of the spirit from one dimension to another (Bolling, 1995: 148). Similar to Brown's (2008) observation about the organisational role of death in slave societies, for African-American communities the dead do not simply transition to the other side, but they are allowed to participate in life. Therefore, the entire community gets together in commemorations and rituals irrespective of closeness of relationship to the deceased. They ritualise the transition that constructs an ancestral community, establishing continuity between the living and the dead, and unity under circumstances of precarity. People affected by vulnerability organise based on their collective struggle. Olwig (2009) made a similar observation in Britain where people of African-Caribbean heritage who may not know the

deceased will attend funerals that take place in far-away locations in order to strengthen a weakened by dislocation community.

Africentric accounts also report hybridisation. The rupture of slavery constituted the preservation of certain aspects of the African culture necessary and vital, but also meant that 'authenticity' was compromised, and accommodations were made. Bolling (1995) - after W.E.D Du Bois (1903) - argued that black folks are forever dual in their belief systems and realities; partly, European, partly African. A unique cosmology creates special circumstances in mental health services that practitioners ought to take into account, because their dual approach extends throughout life and affects the way in which African-Americans handle major themes of development and maturation, the most profound of which is that final stage and final rites of death. Bereavement counsellors need to be aware that the Africentric view of death that has the soul leaving the material world for the spiritual stands in direct contrast with the Eurocentric view that represents death as final. Bolling (1995: 146-147) informs us that perceptions of finality of death in the Eurocentric side of the black identity can contradict their Africentric heritage which includes death. This can cause conflict which impacts negatively upon mourning, loss and grief, and turn death into a frightening and morbid experience (Bolling, 1995: 146-147).

The distinction between adaptive and maladaptive bereavement coping is not a hard and fast one. Whether African-Americans maintain African traditions within an Africentric framework or hybridise and experience inner conflicts, it is important to take into consideration that their understandings of death and responses to loss are informed by historical experiences of oppression. Afterlife beliefs are characteristic of oppressed groups of people (Perry, 1993). The grief narrative in the black experience and a culture saturated by loss originate in the historical experience of black people in the Western world, and it has

yet to finish because it is being reproduced in death rituals and bereavement interactions that respond to marginalisation and racism. The ‘struggle’ narrative is consistent and repetitive within the black worldview (Sullivan, 1995), and there is ‘glorification of suffering’ (Barrett and Heller, 2002). Life is seen as a struggle, and death is an extension of the struggle to live. This is a theme that requires further attention within the bereavement literature and provides the context within which grief can be located and deconstructed more effectively.

### **Rationalising death in the African-American experience**

The studies reviewed in this chapter suggest that the historical legacy of loss and trauma exacerbated by the frequency with which death is experienced in black communities in the Western world coupled by structural disadvantage, compound and inflect experiences of bereavement. This means that there is hardship and resilience at play, and the issue at hand is what is the relationship between the two, how can we explain it, and how can we support wellbeing? The Africentric accounts reviewed in the previous section communicate black subjectivity, but their description can exoticise black experiences. To counteract any misunderstandings, we need to systematically describe social organisation and relationships that implicate with the end of life, bereavement and care.

In 1972, Maurice Jackson published an article on the topic of death because she was alarmed by the way in which black attitudes to death, dying and bereavement were misinterpreted and perceived as ‘otherworldly’ by the wider society. More specifically, according to Jackson (1972: 204) ‘the sacred norm assumes that black people cannot deal effectively with death as a phenomenon in this world and, therefore, should look to and glorify another world, an afterworld’, when they should be viewing death as part of the normal life process, occurring in material experience. Due to lack of sufficient evidence about experiences of death and

bereavement among black people she engaged in analysis of fiction, spirituals and poetry in which death, grief and loss are central narratives. In a conversation with the written record and by establishing a dichotomy between rational and metaphysical or supernatural understandings of death, Jackson demonstrated that in each case ancestral worship and identification with death involved a rational and calculated decision and represented a political stance signifying reaction to racism and protest towards the injustices of slavery. Her analysis is simplistic and limited by the modernist dichotomy between actions viewed as rational or emotional. However, the point highlighted is an important one.

The rationality behind the motives of African-American responses to death and bereavement needs to be reinstated. An effective way to meet this objective is to examine historical interactions with death and mortuary experiences within contexts of oppression and subordination in the Black diaspora. Due to lack of evidence, historical experiences will be vital to data interpretation throughout the analysis of the current research, and there will be iterative reflection between historical and contemporary experiences. Sociological understandings of mortuary experiences will highlight black subjectivity within a Western framework without, on the other hand, constructing the experience as exotic or distant, because it will be placed and rationalised within the present sociological context by taking into consideration patterns of disadvantage that shape culture and attitudes.

### **Proposed framework for the study of death in post-slavery black communities in the West**

I will now briefly introduce the historical context that informs the black encounter with death that historically shaped culture and responses to loss in Western societies. These

considerations will guide interpretation throughout the analysis and will be elaborated upon as needed in subsequent chapters.

The institution of slavery was inextricably linked to suffering and death. This is because slaves were not valued as human beings. They were perceived as commodities that could be replaced through the on-going slave trade when they perished from violence, malnutrition, disease or overwork. The commodification of slaves has been interpreted in the light of capitalist development (Trouillot, 1992; Palmie, 1996b), but there have been additional arguments that explain slavery and violence in terms of patterns in the human encounter with difference. Eltis (1993) explains the turn towards slave labour on the basis of economic justifications but also argues that the choice to enslave Africans depended upon definitions of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. The enslavement of fellow Europeans was inconceivable, especially for the Dutch and the British who nurtured an advanced capitalist Protestant ethic. Yet, they were able to develop the most sophisticated systems of exploitation of non-white labour. A European criminal could be punished with the death sentence, but could not possibly be enslaved. The most undesirable social status, that of the enslaved, that for Patterson (1982) equals ‘social death’, was reserved for non-whites (Eltis, 1993: 1409). Violence and death were central to the experience of people subjected to dehumanisation.

Mortality was high from the point of capture of slaves in Africa and the process of their transportation to the New World. The Middle Passage – the journey from the West coast of Africa to the colonies and plantations of the New World – employed brutal means and caused considerable loss of life. Attempts have been made to calculate the level of mortality during the Middle Passage and beyond - during seasoning<sup>2</sup> and life on the plantations (Curtin, 1968;

---

<sup>2</sup> Seasoning refers to the process by which slaves became accustomed to plantation work and life, and its routines. It lasted a maximum of three years during which time mortality was proportionately higher than that among seasoned slaves (Walvin, 2001).

Klein and Engerman, 1997; Klein, Engerman, Haines and Shlomowitz, 2001). Curtin (1968) estimated that 9,566,100 slaves were imported into the Americas and other parts of the Atlantic basin from 1451 to 1870; a figure that Lovejoy (1982) finds remarkably accurate. Craton (1997: 149-150) reports that due to the deadly climate, diseased environment, hard work regime and overt cruelty, only 670,000 slaves lived on the Caribbean islands in 1834 from 2 million transported over 180 years. In the USA there were 3 million slaves in 1865 from 400,000 transported, but death was still frequent and held similar meanings and significance. Mason (1986) makes similar observations in relation to the Caribbean islands that absorbed 40% of total imports of human life, but by 1850 they contained only 20%.

During the Middle Passage, slaves would die from disease resulting from insanitary conditions, dysentery, lack of nutrition, murder, violence or suicide. Each vessel would be loaded with slaves beyond capacity. They would be placed in close proximity, chained to one another, encouraging the spread of disease through contagion. In the New World plantations, Mason (1986) explains that epidemiology, disease and malnutrition kept fertility levels at a record low, while death rates were high - a factor that constituted the continuation of the slave trade necessary, because there was need and demand for fresh slave labour. Those slaves that survived the Middle Passage were not guaranteed that they would survive 'seasoning', when they were exposed to unfamiliar diseases under strenuous circumstances of overwork and malnutrition. Violence, harsh punishment and murder were also responsible for overwhelming levels of mortality and brutal death (Paton, 2001).

Death in slave societies has been conceptualised and analysed literally and metaphorically. Patterson (1982) raised the argument that the status of the slave was identical to that of 'social death'. This means that slaves could only be defined in terms of their master's ownership over them, and had no socially recognised existence of their own. Their social

exclusion or 'social death' was complete in that formally they were not allowed to actively participate in social, economic and political life. Further, their exclusion was reinforced by their 'natal alienation', 'genealogical isolation' and inability to 'integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory' (Patterson, 1982: 5). Although slaves developed new cultures and communities in the New World and resisted slavery (Palmie, 1996a) they did grieve and experience life as 'living death' because they lacked attachments and stable affiliations within their families, communities and genealogical imagination. As a consequence, their identities were incomplete and insecure; in need of new definitions and opportunities of participation in social organisation. Despite evidence of cultural and social rebirth, Patterson's thesis on slavery and 'social death' stands some value, and relevance to slaves' lived experience.

In this context of pervasive presence of death – literal and metaphorical – the death of a slave was perceived as salvation from hardship and was associated with liberation and freedom, as well as, a return journey to Africa that would reunite the deceased with a family of dead ancestors among the company of which they would be complete and safe (Brown, 2008). European first-person accounts were perplexed and intrigued by the centrality and meaning of funeralisation and death in slave societies across the New World (Walvin, 2001), but barely perceived its meaning.

Genovese (1972: 201) analysed slave funeral rituals and conceptualised them as social events that represent the meanings and perceptions of a community created out of immediate circumstances. However, the past was appropriated and employed as resource to analyse and understand present experience. Slaves considered it essential to have a proper funeral, and



their attitudes towards death have been compared by Genovese to those of the European working classes; in that they invested beyond their means in order to have grand funerals. Meerlo (*see Genovese, 1972: 202*) explains this tendency as an expression of respect for life, and the continuity of the human community and recognition of each man's place within it, in circumstances of mass murder and denial of any aim in this world. African customs and funerary traditions enabled slaves to establish continuity in their inherently interrupted lives, by including death and incorporating the dead, ancestry and past losses in the formation of present communities.

The centrality of death can be explained by its role in preserving community through cultural creativity that alleviated existential concerns and uncertainty. In this respect, death organised social life (Brown, 2008) and played a role in the political life of slaves and shaped their relationships and interactions with their masters. Death represented the moment during which spirituality and emotion penetrated a highly calculated and cruel society. In this way, African custom that advocated the continuity between the world of the living and that of the dead through beliefs in ghosts in need of atonement, or an imaginary return journey to motherland Africa after a tortured worldly life, would become political acts of subtle defiance against slavery, violence, and dehumanisation.

Brown (2008) describes African funerary rituals among slaves which were intended to provoke and scare white masters, who at the face of death of a slave were confronted by their own existential insecurities. Death as a 'quintessential cosmic issue' (*see Verdery in Brown, 2008: 6*) inevitably makes us consider existential issues of what it is to be and to stop being, and in Jamaican slave society where slaves were not recognised for their humanity, death was the ultimate test that exposed their humanity, planted fears in their masters' psyche about their own mortality, and undermined their sovereignty and power. Slaves would encourage

such emotional reactions in their white counterparts through curses, drumming and singing, and African spiritual inquests on the causes of death (Brown, 2008). In this respect, Brown (2008: 255) theorises death as ‘the Grim Reaper’, portrayed as both ‘gardener’ and ‘harvester’ that takes life but also creates new possibilities for empowerment and agency.

In the Western world our understanding of death privileges finality and we find it difficult to grasp and interpret alternative cosmologies that do not draw a dichotomy between the worlds of the living and the dead (Howarth, 2000). When we acknowledge communications between the bereaved and the deceased we do so on a personal level, and in order to enhance coping mechanisms among survivors. In studies of death, dying and grief in communities born out of slavery, however, we need to take into consideration a cultural background that maintains a more intimate relationship with the experience of mortality, and includes aspects of it to recreate and sustain community. Death and life as natural and interconnected cycles, with no beginning or end provide the necessary rationalisation in an otherwise unpredictable, precarious and vulnerable experience that provides no promise of a future. Social disadvantage and racism in contemporary communities in the Black diaspora may have similar effects. In this context, ancestral meanings acquire renewed importance and support present purposes.

A negotiation of the interplay between life and death as metaphors to describe post-slavery black experience is offered in writings within a Western literary genre - the ghost novel. African-American ghost novels were made popular by Tony Morrison’s *Beloved*. The haunting of the present represents the intergenerational influence of slavery and social disadvantage that imprint upon the psychology, social identifications and structural opportunities of marginalised black people. The novel - a useful critique of which can be found in Holland (2000) - reflect gender positions and subjectivity, and focus upon

experiences of black women. The trauma of slavery, death and historical oppression shape their lived reality and intensify their responsibilities within social reproduction (Thornton Dill, 1986). For this reason, the past lives within the present, and the dead remind the living of intergenerational patterns of disadvantage, grief and loss. Black women in the West live life with a perspective upon loss and structure their lives accordingly. Survival and self-preservation drive family and its organisation and define relationships. People maintain an alternative perspective on life and treat death differently, with acceptance, because they find the opportunity of transformation in loss. This thesis will initiate a discourse within which the idea that death plays organisational role and shapes peoples' lives, mobilising social action and agency is central.

## **Conclusion**

Research on experiences of grief among black people in Western societies follow interpretative schemas drawn from studies on majority populations. In this context, the subjective meanings of people who do not entirely adhere by Western values – either because they did not have the opportunity and/or identify with alternative systems - are being misinterpreted. At best, they are inadequately theorised, lacking consideration for their historical basis and organisation that influence understandings of death and bereavement experiences. At worst, they reify and pathologise grief and cultural attitudes.

While Western cosmology excludes mortality, black peoples' perspectives on the same topic aim to organise society, maintain past memories and re-connect with ancestry and repeatedly interrupted histories. Death is a representation of life in marginality and communicates lived experience. The theme provides meaning to oppressed lives, while it reinforces a necessary and functional familiarity with the experience of death and loss in contexts of

marginalisation and social exclusion. Encounters with mortality are being negotiated in cultural and social contexts and play a role in social and structural organisation. In this thesis, this observation will be taken into consideration and effort will be made to analyse bereavement and its role within social organisation. Significant insight will be gained from analysis of related experiences in historical perspective, because trans-historical comparisons will highlight important patterns.

Postcolonialism enables us to understand how black people in Western societies utilised their familiarity with the dominant culture and identifications within the larger society in order to assert powerful political statements and make claims for greater equality and representation. Death played a central role within this popular approach to social justice. The latter constructs death as central and functional to social life and ascribes mortality an organisational role. It also explains cultural hybridity in diasporic contexts and the potential of loss to create growth, development and promote social change in flexible processes of adaptation. This thesis will study how this unique relationship with mortality is negotiated in the context of experiences of bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Researching bereavement in African-Caribbean communities in Britain**

#### **Introduction**

The present chapter describes the methodology employed in this thesis. The participatory and observational approach adopted is specifically designed to serve purposes of representation of bereavement experiences among racialised and socially excluded African-Caribbean heritage communities. This approach to research is intended to serve transformational and emancipatory purposes by revealing new understandings beyond descriptive assumptions and highlighting gaps in knowledge. The chapter will commence with a general outline of the research strategy and its methodological and theoretical justification. This will be followed by presentation of the fieldwork plan and consideration of research design issues including access, sampling, and ethical problems. The tools of data collection and analysis will finally be discussed.

To serve the purposes of this research and answer my research questions, I employed a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis within the framework of an ethnographic research design. Researching bereavement in British African-Caribbean heritage communities and its relationship to historical processes of diasporic trauma involves the study of cultural meanings and the deconstruction of social organisation responsible for creating hardship. These relationships are expressed in cultural production and creativity that reflect experiences and shared meanings.

Bereavement in Western societies has traditionally been researched in the context of interviews. This reflects the verbal method in which bereavement experiences are communicated in the West. In contrast, African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain express such notions differently. Grief is negotiated in casual discussions and symbolically represented in commemorative rituals, including funerals. It is also expressed in art and other forms, such as first-person accounts, literature and poetry, music and visual/material culture. The latter constitutes an additional reason for which a multi-method approach was employed to include a variety of sources and types of data.

### **Research strategy**

The choice of ethnographic research design was purposeful and aimed to provide answers to the research questions of this thesis (Manstead and Semin, 1988). It also allowed me to study over an extended period of time bereavement experiences without exclusively relying upon interview data. This was important as recruitment of participants in interviews was low from the start, and initial analysis of interview data did not provide substantial information on bereavement. Rather, it pointed towards experiences of loss due to social disadvantage and inequalities that could be researched via other and more unobtrusive and engaging methods. Instead, through the combination of methods and sources and the consideration of multi-disciplinary theoretical understandings, I deconstructed the social complexity that informs bereavement experiences in minority African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain.

The ethnographic fieldwork for this research lasted for two years. During this time, I was entering the field as and when needed. For set intervals, I was visiting an ethnic minority senior citizen luncheon centre twice a week but also carried out research in other venues and settings. I was simultaneously spending time researching documentary sources and the literature, and analysing incoming data, identifying patterns, and triangulating findings.

After analysis, I would return to the field in order to acquire new insights according to the principles of grounded theory analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967[1999]). The length of the intervening time between iterative episodes of data collection and analysis varied depending upon the depth and range of the analytical exercises performed. In this way, I collected a large amount of materials that contributed to the overall ethnographic description. Findings have been theorised in ways that do not specifically refer to participants' personal experiences, but to general trends that can be identified within African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain. Such prioritisation of sociological theoretical considerations does not ignore personal meaning and narrative but draws from and is therefore sensitive to it.

Central to research design considerations for this thesis have been the practicalities of fieldwork, including the availability of time and money, research opportunities and access to setting locations (Hakim, 1987). Lack of resources did not significantly interfere with the ethnographic fieldwork. I could fit regular visits to the sites into my everyday routine and paid work responsibilities. My irregular paid work patterns meant that I was able to spend more time in local African-Caribbean heritage communities where I developed research relationships with participants. Gradually, I accumulated a collection of written accounts, literature sources, audio-visual material and cultural artefacts, and triangulated information and sources. For community members and research participants, I was a frequent visitor and familiar face that asked questions, served coffee and tea and engaged in casual conversations, although my identity as researcher was known.

Research participants contributed accounts that carry political meanings and trusted me with some sensitive information in order to serve the interests of research with transformational purposes. This is an additional reason for the prioritisation of theoretical considerations grounded in participants' accounts. My intention is to describe meanings that represent

collective sentiments and perspectives that may contradict the wider society's views and assumptions about bereavement in socially disadvantaged communities. My position as an outsider to all parties, meant that I could embrace a fresh perspective. My lack of initial familiarity with historical relationships increased my interest and willingness to learn and enabled me to conduct grounded theory analysis more effectively without preconceptions and assumptions. However, the contestations between academic discourse and lay perspectives cannot be easily resolved. This is even more so, when existing theoretical constructs are limited while new ones proposed by the research cannot be readily adopted by the academic community. In either case, I am interested in proposing understandings of loss with implications for community care policy and practice and communicate new insights on existing identifications that aid adaptation to loss and promote social inclusion. In this sense, the research objective is prioritised.

### ***Verstehen* in ethnography**

A central feature of ethnographic research is the understanding of meaningful experiences within cultural and social organisation from an interpretivist/phenomenological epistemological perspective (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The role of subjective meanings in producing social reality is prioritised and guides ontological concerns and the selection of data sources. In this thesis, a social constructionist approach to social reality is advocated, and applied to the understanding of both structure and agency. In other words, I analyse how participants negotiate their experiences and promote social change as they reconstruct meaning after bereavement within unequal social contexts that limit their options and choices. Interpretations of social reality interact with ongoing personal narratives, and these are analysed in conjunction to one another in the process of record keeping - in diaries and reflexive writing. This very basic sociological method was developed by C.W. Mills in



the appendix of his most popular publication *The Sociological Imagination* (Mills, 1959: [2000]: 1995-228).

In social sciences there is debate surrounding the mode of acquisition of data and the conduct of the researcher. The level of empathy and degree of researcher involvement varies. Empathy may be unavoidable and necessary in order to access the depth of meanings. It also serves the ethnographic descriptive potential to its entirety. The ethnographic method can describe naturalistic contexts and subjective experiences in everyday life. However, it simultaneously offers a unique opportunity to analyse sociological processes within a holistic and multi-dimensional framework. For this reason, its intellectual potential neutralises tendencies of over-identification with the experiences of participants. The negotiation of the latter must remain a central reflexive focus for the researcher throughout the research process, and later during analysis and theoretical development.

My sociological background and personal characteristics prescribed a certain mode of relating to the experiences and people studied. As an outsider to the African-Caribbean heritage communities and to the majority culture and society, I was able to study social reality from a value free perspective. My main driver has been the promotion of equalities among a marginalised community, as well as the identification of processes of grief obscured by popular misunderstanding. Although I did not aim to exploit participants and was always explicit about my intentions, my approachable and empathetic character, and sociological expertise cultivated trust in participants, and the willingness to reveal subjective political positions. To meet their expectations and fulfil my responsibilities, I systematically analysed experiences according to the theories and methods of sociological inquiry after data was collected. In this way, I produce thick descriptions of personal meanings and experiences interpreted in high analytical detail and within a particular sociological context.

Emphatic understanding in the context of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary research is possible on the basis that we are all parts of the same human society, which we produce in rationalised action and efforts towards social participation. This is an interactional pattern that allowed me to enter a different culture and engage productively and meaningfully with its people and processes. Simmel's 'stranger' (Simmel, 1950) could profitably describe the process of defamiliarisation that I underwent during the fieldwork. Methodological triangulation allowed me to gradually build a set of knowledge on the communities, their processes and subjective rationalisations.

Weber's *Verstehen* is equally useful when the objective is to perceive subjective rationalisations that contradict normative values. According to Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2006: 410) *Verstehen* involves rationalisation, deconstruction and categorisation of contextual relationships. Weber claimed that *Verstehen* is, despite appearances, rational, and tried to equate the interpretation of social reality by subjective understanding with causal explanation. Craib (1997: 49) with reference to Leat (1972) explains that we are all members of the same society or world in which the people whose experiences we are interested in, construct and communicate their meanings. We can, therefore, understand the rationality that guides their actions and predict patterns that constitute society. For Weber, the development of causal explanations by sociologists strengthens their work and makes it rational and resilient to reliability and validity concerns. This can be the case where subjectivity is different and marginal if we establish its references within social organisation.

This study of bereavement experiences in African-Caribbean heritage communities considers social transformation in the context of meaning-making and loss. Interactions within a framework of unequal social organisation are relevant to this analytical exercise.

Ethnographies with their descriptive detail offer opportunities for the study of those relationships and provide interpretations of subjective motives and rationalised, meaningful action. The advantage is that in doing so, it does not require comprehensive conceptualisation of experiences by participants themselves. It is the role of the researcher to analyse subjective experiences by taking into consideration wider social issues and related theoretical interpretations. For this reason, ethnography offers itself to research on sensitive topics and multi-faceted, complex experiences. It provides alternative insights on social problems, which can be utilised to expand avenues of inter-cultural communication. Emphatic understanding or *Verstehen* can significantly enhance the quality of representations of subjective meanings in marginalised communities, and ethnography provides opportunities to develop this kind of reflexive approach on findings.

### **Research design**

In the current thesis I investigate the ways in which cultures of grief and loss implicate with bereavement outcomes in the context of involuntary diasporisations and structural inequalities. There are two angles to the problem that require in-depth analysis:

- (a) bereavement informed by cultures of grief that originate in continuing memories of traumatic dislocation and historical patterns of inequality that place present social relationships into perspective and explain them; and
- (b) the deconstruction of social organisation and consideration of its implications upon social relationships that construct bereavement experiences.

Although I embarked upon data collection with a clear plan by locating African-Caribbean heritage community organisations in the South-West of England, I limited my fieldwork

considerably in the process and compensated with the utilisation of alternative methods of data collection, such as archival research and the study of material culture. This is because grounded theory as a research strategy involves purposeful and targeted collection of data on the basis of episodic interpretations of findings, as they are progressively constructing narratives following systematic coding and categorisation.

Interviews provide the personal bereavement narratives that initially invited analysis of social structures in historical perspective. Observations complemented interview data and added insights on social organisation. I then analysed social structures in historical perspective by reviewing relevant academic literature, and confirmed that these understandings reflect African-Caribbean heritage peoples' meanings by researching archives, written records, visual culture and expressive/artistic forms of communication. The identification of patterns within social organisation was then applied upon the interpretation of bereavement experiences, highlighting processes of negotiation and social change mobilised by loss and resilience. In this way, I utilised the potential of ethnographic research to provide complex descriptions of experiences and subjectivity through 'methodological triangulation' (Davidson and Layder, 1994).

The chosen approach to data collection and analysis serves the needs of research on sensitive topics. It also provides in-depth, exploratory understanding on novel topics. Most significantly, it is compatible with the way in which grief is expressed in African-Caribbean heritage cultures. It was my understanding throughout this research that people of African-Caribbean heritage rationalise their grief and use this lens to interpret life's experiences. Interviews are not always productive in the context of a rationalised approach to grief. I sometimes had to have multiple conversations with a single person before I realised that they were inviting me to accompany them in their grief in order to access the meanings involved.

Understanding was established in compassionate communication that consoled the bereaved and aided the process of meaning-making. The interview encounter was essentially transformative and conducive to their bereavement process – a finding that has been reported by Valentine (2007a). Mr Thompson, for example, expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to construct meaning and conceptualise his loss and relationships during the interview. Mary also came to significant realisations on the impact of loss upon her life during the interview. This altered earlier perspectives and contributed to further growth. Ethnographies provide unique opportunities for producing knowledge and insight in the context of interaction between the researcher and researched because they place interpretations within wider socio-historical contexts.

Interview participants were selected from the observation settings. Participants were people interested in my research who had a story to tell. I also attempted to make contact with people in the community through informants who work in social services or the local council. Finally, I met people in the various events, public lectures and discussions that I attended. The observation settings represented a mixture of secular and religious communities of support and care. Specifically, I carried out multiple observations at an organisation that provides professional support and care, as well as opportunities for socialisation to ethnic minority citizens of senior age. I also visited a Pentecostal religious community. My access in this setting was limited, but I managed to obtain useful data during the occasions that I visited and talked to participants.

While analysing interview and observation data I was also researching local council archives, as well as other electronic archives that I could access online. In Bristol there is the Bristol Black Archives Partnership (BBAP) collection which contains individual and family histories and biographies of members of the local African-Caribbean heritage communities.

The Nottinghamshire's African-Caribbean Heritage<sup>3</sup>, the Black Presence in Britain<sup>4</sup> and the National Archives<sup>5</sup> all contain important information which I researched only to discover that there are repeated narratives about a heritage of loss and trauma associated with slavery and their post-migration experience of racialization in Britain. Eventually, I visited the Black Cultural Archives<sup>6</sup> in London amidst the summer riots of August 2011 from which I gained an insight into the political positions and experiences of people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain, and their networks and identifications in the Transatlantic diaspora. Archived material is also effectively collected and published by Francis (1998), in *The Windrush Legacy* sponsored by the Black Cultural Archives and Phillips and Phillips (1998). Studying African-Caribbean material culture - symbols, rituals, visual representations, novel writing and poetry – elaborated academic interpretations and grounded them upon subjective representations of meaning.

Finally, in the design stage of this research I considered issues that relate to (1) the social setting in which the research would take place, (2) the population from which I would draw my sample and sampling strategy, (3) the individuals, places and institutions from which I would attempt to gain access, and ways in which access would be negotiated, and finally (4) the ethical considerations of this research.

### ***The social setting***

From all the forcible population movements that identify with a traumatic social and historical legacy I purposefully chose to carry out my research with the post-slavery black

---

<sup>3</sup> Information about the Nottinghamshire's African-Caribbean Heritage archives can be accessed online from <http://cms.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/leisure/archives/exhibitions/africancaribbeanheritage.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Information about the Black Presence in Britain archive can be accessed online from <http://www.blackpresence.co.uk/>.

<sup>5</sup> Information about the National archives on the African-Caribbean presence in Britain can be accessed from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>.

diaspora in the Western world, and specifically with African-Caribbean migrant communities in Britain. Although they arrived in the UK as economic migrants linked to Britain through affective postcolonial bonds, the diasporisation of black people in the West has roots in slavery. Jews, Armenians and the Irish also suffered loss and trauma in modern history, but I was particularly interested in the cultural elaborations of loss and associated meanings among African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain. There is limited and inadequate theorisation of the role of grief and the traumatic legacy of slavery upon contemporary black experiences in Western societies. There has been in the past and before migration to the UK, a paradoxical mode of relating to British colonial identities, which will be discussed in chapter 5. Suffice here to say that migration, rejection and ensued political contestations resurfaced historical identifications with loss that proved useful in promoting growth and resilience in adversity. Such conditions support hybridity and the development of coping mechanisms that promote social change.

The sociological theorisation of bereavement experiences requires consideration of the social context in which experiences are played out, because they have a role in the production of an explanation. In this sense, we are focusing upon a particular example of a wider experience, which according to Yin (2009) presents us with the opportunity to carry out case study research. The study of African-Caribbean heritage experiences of bereavement in Britain within an ethnographic framework offers the opportunity to employ a multi-method approach to data collection in order to reveal social complexity. It takes into consideration contextual factors and focuses upon a single case in great analytical detail. I only studied two small communities and interviewed a small number of people. Most participants I had the opportunity to meet more than once, and I was privileged to get to know them in their everyday lives and natural environments. I, therefore, analysed not only their accounts of bereavement, but also how other factors in their social lives shape their experiences.

According to Yin (2009), these features describe the case study method, which is mainly explanatory, but also exploratory and descriptive. The researcher has little control over events but is responsible for creating operational links through methodological triangulation. Case study findings make analytic generalisations and have theoretical value. Finally, the ethnographic approach to case study research was profitable because it advanced cultural interpretations and understandings that inform sociological analysis. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) argue that ethnographies are culturally informed case studies. In chapters 7 and 8 I treat the experience of each participant as a case study in order to distinguish and highlight the unique narratives that they represent. However, the entire ethnography shares the characteristics of case study research.

### ***Sampling***

The sampling frame for this research is African-Caribbean heritage communities and their experiences in Britain. Findings are drawn from two African-Caribbean heritage communities in the South-West of England, as well as wider research into archives and literature sources (academic, research-led, fiction and poetry), as well as the grey literature. Findings are not generalizable to all African-Caribbean heritage communities in the country because they may experience unique circumstances. However, the study provides theoretical and analytical insights that could invite reflection among African-Caribbean heritage communities about their experiences of bereavement, and influence thinking in research communities and public services. Findings and theoretical propositions will also create a conversation on the nature of loss and resilience that can be applied not only within other settings of the post-slavery black diaspora in the West, but also in contexts where loss is a pervasive experience and defines identity.



Key urban centres in the South-West of England contain organised and close-knit African-Caribbean heritage communities that offer opportunities for research on the topic under consideration. I initially followed a wide-net approach to sampling; mixing and mingling with participants and informants in the centres that I attended to tease out ideas and find a little bit more about their experiences. Bryman (2008) calls this convenience sampling. However, I also tried to recruit participants not affiliated with the centres where I carried out fieldwork and have limited involvement in organised communities. Nonetheless, everyone identified with bigger or smaller groupings within the African-Caribbean heritage community, depending upon their experience and place within social organisation. Finally, in order to expand accounts and include wider considerations that represent a greater variety of African-Caribbean experiences in Britain, I researched written records, expressive forms and material culture. Narratives of loss can be corroborated beyond the two communities where primary research was carried out, and for this purpose, the sociological theorisation of bereavement experiences and socio-cultural analysis may have wider implications.

My approach to sampling has been purposeful in that I tried to represent a range of experiences encountered during fieldwork cut across lines of gender and age. However, there have been accessibility constraints attributed to social disadvantage and compromised trust. For this purpose, I had to focus upon methodologically triangulating findings through other sources and identifying the reasons for loss of trust. Ultimately, I had to limit my observations to simultaneously focus upon theoretical development on generalised notions of loss that still affect attitudes towards grief and bereavement. I employed the snowballing technique to recruit participants through friendships, relationships and contacts, but was still able to target particular cases in order to represent a diversity of experiences. Towards the end of the data collection process, I also engaged in theoretical sampling, making the ideas, concepts and categories that build a developing theory the criteria of inclusion and exclusion

of participants and cases. Saturation was reached not when I represented the totality of experiences, but when I described a form of social organisation central to experiences of bereavement in the context of African-Caribbean communities in Britain. Unique cases were given special consideration and highlight additional factors, such as sexuality, crime, education, employment that interfere and shape bereavement narratives and identifications.

### ***Access***

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that in ethnographic research access is negotiated in private and public settings, but Bryman (200) notes that the distinction between the two is not a hard and fast one (Bryman, 2008). For simplicity purposes, we might want to agree that private settings are those for which access to narratives, histories and accounts or to observation settings, needs to be negotiated between the researcher and participants or gatekeepers. Public settings are those where no formal negotiation of access is necessary. As I will also explain access to participants' meanings was not a straightforward process in the context of observational research even though my identity as researcher was overt and known to participants.

In interviews the ethical considerations of sensitive research, such as harm, anonymity and confidentiality, were explicitly communicated. Respondents were then invited to narrate their life experiences by taking into consideration that bereavement was the central interview topic. Access to meanings in interviews was challenging because of issues of trust towards a society that has been systematically unreliable. And yet, there was willingness to engage and communicate African-Caribbean heritage experiences of loss in distinct ways. With mutual efforts to ease into the interview encounter and build communication, rapport and understanding, participants described a life affected by loss and referred to aspects of their personal lives that they view in this light. Some tried to communicate how they feel with

metaphors, artefacts, and records that they keep reminding them of the deceased or other types of loss. This is invaluable in sociological research on bereavement as it indicates where within social organisation, we need to look for explanations of participants' experiences. As a first-time ethnographer I was initially hesitating to trust the data and follow the leads because the process was very different to the verbalised emotional accounts produced by research on bereavement among Western populations. However, grounded theory analysis engaged me in analytical work that abstracted findings from the data and required me to follow clues. In this way, I started utilising a wide variety of materials and sources, categorised it and iteratively over a prolonged period constructed an ethnographic description.

Access to observation settings was negotiated between the researcher and gatekeepers who also acted as significant research informants that translated community experiences and indicated research directions. The communities were rather small, and I made efforts to be inclusive and talk to as many members as possible. For this reason, gatekeepers informed participants about my identity and research intentions and provided information in writing. They also acquired informed consent to undertake fieldwork and proceed with data collection. To avoid intrusion of privacy, I invited to interview those participants that seemed interested and willing to talk to me. Access was at this point re-negotiated. Interviewing in ethnographic research is ambiguous at times. Some participants continued our interview conversation in the context of naturalistic observations. Other participants talked to me about their lives and often referred to deceased family members when they were not being interviewed. Wherever possible, and without undermining the objectives of naturalistic research, I made effort to maintain professional relationships reminding participants of my research and role within the organisation. I would also ask them if it would allow me to use the unsolicited information they had offered. In this respect, access and consent in

ethnographic research are not straightforward processes and need to be constantly negotiated. I did not include information that could potentially undermine participants' wellbeing and social relationships.

Participant rapport and trust are necessary in the negotiation of access to observation settings and interviews. My gender, age, ethnicity and student status, as well as character invited trust and engagement with the research process. I am an external to the colonial relationship, I am familiar with issues of loss and marginality, and I am approachable and communicative. I was, at the same time, professional in my interactions, with a willingness to understand from a neutral perspective. I tried to maintain balance and did not attempt to get too close or access unnecessary information although I carried out research with empathy. I was interested in accessing naturalistic behaviour, interactions, and meanings. I did not exercise pressure upon participants to talk about experiences that would make them feel uncomfortable. Although this strategy did not produce a huge amount of interview data, it was productive in that I was able to study the meanings of silence, or the spaces where communication breaks. To make their case, participants used metaphors and representations that draw links to their personal lives and experiences. I interpreted and framed their narratives in case studies presented in chapters 7 and 8.

The material presented is politically charged. Due to the sensitivity of the experiences reported and the ethical implications of ethnographic research, I employed the method's potential to make significant theoretical contributions based on research on subjective experiences and meanings. Theoretical prioritisation in the current thesis significantly reduced demands made upon participants and the need to negotiate access. Subjective personal experiences are presented but are contextualised within a certain social framework. The latter enhances rather than undermines the interpretation of personal experiences

because it adds analytical value and depth to accounts. In sensitive and under-researched topics it is a profitable way of gaining valuable insights within a short period of time and by maintaining an unobtrusive presence.

### ***Ethics***

According to Kellehear (1993: 11) ethics in social research 'refer to the responsibility that researchers have towards each other, the people who are being researched, and the wider society which supports that research'. Professional associations like the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Social Research Association (SRA) have formulated codes of ethics which are commonly used by researchers in reflecting upon the ethical implications of their work. These guidelines are often called upon by researchers who seek ethical approval of their research from ethics committees. Kellehear (1989) notes that 'ethics cannot simply imply the use of broad checklists' considered before embarking upon fieldwork. Ethical considerations benefit research when they initiate a reflexive process in the context of interactions with research participants and material, and later in the presentation and dissemination of findings.

Professional guidelines for ethics in social research emphasise the importance of:

- avoiding causing harm upon participants;
- acquiring their informed consent;
- avoiding invading their privacy or deceiving them, and
- maintaining their confidentiality

Ethnographic research raises ethical considerations that arise from the close proximity between the researcher and participants, and related issues of honesty and deceit (Punch, 1986). In the process of data collection and in the context of repeated observations, as the researcher and participants build rapport, boundaries may relax and the roles may become

less well defined. It, therefore, becomes questionable whether participants willingly disclose information, or they have forgotten the purpose of the encounter. For this reason, throughout fieldwork I intentionally reminded participants of my research intentions and reiterated my ethical responsibilities towards them. In this way, I redefined the research environment in repeated interactions. Gradually participants learned to relate to me as a researcher and although this may go against the principles of naturalistic research, my approachable qualities compensated for my professionalism and maintained a sense of the ordinary in our interactions and exchanges.

Research was carried out in a conscientious manner by taking into consideration participants' needs and safety. Understanding that bereavement and race constitute sensitive topics, I was reticent to set strict research priorities. I allowed participants to set the tone and research focus and reveal their subjective experiences and perspectives. For this purpose, I carried out exploratory interviews inviting narrative descriptions. This was a productive research direction because I was able to corroborate narratives and interpret them in relation to evidence presented in other sources. In this way, I provided contextual insights which are necessary in the production of comprehensive sociological theories on bereavement. In my research, I made wide use of sources which are least invasive to the lives of participants. Borrowing insights from unobtrusive research methods (Kellehear, 1993), I utilised sources that already exist and reveal actual rather than reported experience. The approach minimises the danger of causing harm upon participants during the research encounter.

The current thesis represents the experiences and interpretations of research participants. However, theoretical constructs position understanding within a sociological framework and contextual definitions of bereavement. Academic priorities are balanced by effort to

original theorisation of an under-researched topic that addresses disenfranchised experiences. Without compromising meanings or theoretical development, I placed effort upon ensuring that participants are not exposed by the presentation of findings. Within African-Caribbean heritage communities in the South-West of England people know each other well, and are aware of their individual circumstances, needs, and wider social issues. There are voluntary networks of informal carers that provide support, and all community members have roles within those settings. My approach to confidentiality has been not to communicate anything beyond what is already known among community members, but to provide a sociological explanation of social reality with reference to experiences of death, dying, loss and end-of-life care. Anonymity is maintained throughout analysis and pseudonyms are being used. Personal accounts do not aim to single out experiences but to contribute to theoretical formulation facilitated by the ethnographic description.

Research is a highly political exercise that combines the stakes of various communities and individuals. I resolved the ethical implications that arise from competing interests by maintaining a discursive and reflexive approach towards related issues, and by informing research design, data collection, analysis and interpretations with the outcomes of these negotiations. Within a PhD thesis, a key concern is the production of an original and innovative explanation that does not cause harm but benefits participants, science and society. Towards the end of exercising 'reflexivity' (Davidson and Layder, 1994), I frequently reflected upon ethical issues in a diary and talked with fellow PhD students and lecturers about related concerns. Kellehear (1989: 14) argues that:

*'Ethical concerns are social. Ethical guidelines are developed because we desire to avoid harming others. This social concern is about accountability and it therefore reaches its optimal consideration only if discussed with others'*

I attended seminar discussions on ethics where I presented a sample of my data reflected upon ethical considerations and invited peer suggestions. I talked with my supervisor who is firmly positioned on the topic of ethics (Kellehear, 1993), and my approach was approved and complimented by my Transfer panel. Finally, I sought ethical approval from my department, and was invited to a consultation with a specialist on the subject who granted me with permission to carry on researching and present my findings.

Obligations towards participants and the academic community do not end with the completion of this project. Ethics will involve ongoing negotiations that will determine my career journey through progressive dissemination of research findings. Towards this end, I appreciate that the content of this thesis is highly political and needs to be communicated sensitively and with consideration. Due to its significance and originality this process will become important. Material culture and the modes of expression employed by participants of this research might become important means by which I will be able to communicate findings more effectively to wider audiences. This is an important principle of grounded theory analysis and is, therefore, compatible with the analytical approach employed in this thesis.

### **Research tools**

A multi-method approach will access accounts through the triangulation of findings that will yield conclusions in logical induction and cross-referencing of information. Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple methods to study a single issue. The accumulation of pieces of information, progressively construct the holistic ethnographic description, while they offer the opportunity to check the validity of the data. Methodological triangulation also



invites reflexivity upon the role of the researcher and the impact of his/her political and moral values upon the research findings (Davidson and Layder, 1994: 53).

When we are investigating a topic that requires emphatic understanding it is likely that we will identify with the meanings communicated by the participants to a greater or lesser extent (Davidson and Layder, 1994: 32). The latter raises the issue of the researcher as a subjective being with political and moral perspectives, and methodological triangulation that involves revisiting findings several times and looking at them from multiple perspectives, can play a role in increasing our confidence in the research findings or revising our perspectives.

### ***Archives and material culture***

In this thesis, people, as well as archives, written records, photographs and audio-visual material are treated as data sources. There is a lot of information from which we can learn about the heritage of loss and culture of grief in African-Caribbean heritage communities in archived records, which are open to the public, as well as, in novels, poems, film, music and art. These can be examined against theoretically informed historical interpretations in order to understand the subjectivity of participants, assess their position within social organisation, and sociologically explain their experiences of bereavement. In this research, I evaluate bereavement by taking into consideration historical experiences and considering how identifications that emanate in historical loss and inequality inflect responses to death and bereavement processes. In this way, I examine the social structures and relationships that cultivated a culture of grief and established patterns of interactions that to this day shape bereavement. Had I not paid attention to the African-Caribbean material culture with which my participants identify, I would not have been able to answer my research questions, nor fulfil the aims of sociological inquiry. I would also have exercised undue pressure to my participants to provide interview accounts against their will.

The use of archived sources and material culture has the advantage that it is least invasive into the lives of participants. Kellehear (1993) theorised ‘unobtrusive’ research methods and included the use of archives and audio-visual records, material culture (physical objects, settings and traces), as well as simple observations into his proposed methodology that does not involve asking people to provide data either in the form of interviews, focus groups or questionnaires. Among other advantages, unobtrusive research methods enable us to study actual rather than reported behaviour, and they do not interfere with the routine of participants or make demands upon their time. The current thesis is not ‘unobtrusive’ but tries to make use of data that already exists and is publicly available to better answer the research questions, and avoid exhausting participants’ resources, time, and energy. People of African-Caribbean heritage have put enormous amounts of energy into expressing their life situations in music, film, diaries, written accounts, and material culture, and it would be an omission to exclude it from consideration.

### ***Interviews***

In ethnographic research the most employed method of data collection is observations. The privileging of naturalism within the early anthropological tradition led to suspicion towards interview data, claiming that interviewer effects bias results and responses. Participant observation, on the other hand, was believed to yield data uncontaminated by the researcher that reflects the natural everyday life of participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Nevertheless, interviews are used in ethnographies because they ‘often allow one to generate information that would be very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain otherwise’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 131). In the current thesis interviews enabled access to bereavement narratives that provide the basis to further data analysis. It was interview data that indicated areas and topics suitable for further investigation in secondary sources

because it was those bereavement stories and their references to contextual circumstances that I was interested in interpreting in the first instance. My approach to soliciting and analysing interview data allowed me to contextualise bereavement within a cultural and social framework.

In order to contextualise bereavement narratives, I asked each interviewee to provide background information on their experience and describe possible identifications with the Caribbean and Britain. Bereavement narratives would then be examined within a historical framework of social organisation the consideration of which provides interpretations of African-Caribbean experiences in contemporary contexts. In analysing interview data, I employed a cross-sectional approach. Class was not a primary factor that diversifies bereavement experiences, and although there is internal structural difference within African-Caribbean heritage communities, members mainly identify with their historical experience of economic subordination in Western societies. In this respect, race and processes of racialization are important in uniting people of African-Caribbean heritage in common causes and identifications. Narratives were singled out, categorised and placed within a historical, social and cultural framework that provides a description and a theory of bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities. In these explanations a legacy of loss and trauma were found to be central.

During the fieldwork for the current research, I carried out 18 interviews with male and female people of African-Caribbean heritage ranging from 24 to 91 years old. My aim in recruiting participants was to represent a range of gender and age-specific narratives, and their relationships with experiences of racialization and loss. I also wanted to explicate participants' identifications with the African-Caribbean traumatic historical legacy and culture of grief. In this way, I recruited the following mixture of interview participants:

<b>Research participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Loss</b>
Beatrice	53	Community project manager	Jamaica	Community members
Mrs Grace	75	Retired care assistant	Jamaica	Husband
Cynthia	57	Counsellor	Jamaica	Parents
Mary	61	Social worker	Jamaica	Father & brother
Anne	42	Student, care assistant	Jamaica	Father
Mr Howarth	85	Retired, entrepreneur, bus driver	Antigua, Barbados	2 children, sister
Mr Thompson	91	Retired, former RAF official	Barbados	Ex-wife
John	50	Unemployed	Jamaica	Mother, brother
Alex	30	PhD student	Jamaica, Ireland	Grandmother
Mrs Helen	72	Retired nurse	Barbados	Parents
Nick	27	Student	Barbados	Grandparents
Mrs Sandra	65	Funeral director	Antigua	Husband
Edward	54	Computer technician	Bahamas	Mother
Fred	46	Equalities officer	St Vincent	Grandmother
Sharon	24	Musician	Antigua	Grandmother
Rose	44	Project worker	Jamaica	Father
George	64	Unemployed	Jamaica	Mother
Melissa	52	Council employee	Jamaica	Relative in Jamaica

Admittedly, not all age ranges or experiences are represented in the sample. Senior men and middle-aged women were more willing to participate in interviews. This is because they take roles in the representation of the community to the outside world. However, I complemented my data on topics and categories in which access was challenging with observations and further research within secondary sources. I talked to many senior women in the context of casual observations and accessed the meanings they wanted to communicate in relation to their structural disadvantage and experiences of loss. In addition,

I did not research bereavement experiences among African-Caribbean heritage young people to a sufficient extent. However, initial data analysis indicates empowering experiences of bereavement, in which hybridity and the ability to operate within more than one cultural framework play a role. Further investigation into this area would yield data that I would not be able to contain within the limits of a single thesis.

My primarily unstructured approach to interviewing emanates from my perspective on reality as socially constructed and the potential of the interview encounter to create situated experiences and meanings. However, this is not to suggest that research cannot represent reality accurately. Rather, it implies that interpretations change as people develop within their interactions and refine their perspectives in the context of reflexive understanding. In order to stay close to participants' lived experiences and my sociological approach, I avoided emotionalising the interview encounter that according to Silverman (2001: 92-94) is characteristic of the journalistic interview. Remaining centred but compassionate was necessary for the additional reason that the research topic can evoke strong emotions or even cause harm and upset. Interviews took the form of casual interactions in the context of which narratives and life histories were deconstructed.

Holstein and Gubrium (1997: 127) argued that we can learn a great deal about 'reality' within a social constructionist framework if we pay attention to the meanings produced and the circumstances that condition the meaning-making process. Interview data reports on both *how* and *what* questions, and in order to be able to access both levels of understanding we have to take into account factors that may be influencing the participants' responses, including the interviewer, socially held values and assumptions, culture and society. In interview analysis guided by constructionism there are no 'true' or 'false' accounts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Silverman, 2001) because people can and do hold

conflicting sentiments at any given time, and the interview is considered the outcome of the interaction between several factors. The aim is to analyse those factors influencing and producing the accounts provided.

For this purpose, I engaged in different levels of analysis, deconstructing the historical modes of social organisation among African-Caribbean heritage communities, as well as their cultural meanings. I also engaged in self-reflexive exercises to assess the way in which my role as a researcher influenced data and interpretations. As I will explain in the following section, an insider to the community would have probably more readily understood subjective meanings, but I was able to engage in complex reasoning that provides original theoretical insights. The application of methodological triangulation itself invited reflection and enabled me to revisit interview data and develop initial analyses. Further interviews were informed by knowledge acquired in the process of simultaneous data collection and analysis, and questions were adapted accordingly to inform further understanding. Reflexive practice during each interview encounter and consideration of the additional analyses performed in-between interviews enabled me to focus each interaction upon the task at hand and produce analytically valuable interview data.

### ***Observations***

Observations produced a large part of the data collected, because like interviews they raised important research questions, which I answered by tapping into the African-Caribbean cultural capital and historical experience. They also confirmed interview findings, complemented them or added new insights. Observations often meet the standards of unobtrusive research methodology (Kellehear, 1993), because they do not interfere with the participants' routine. Although I was openly a researcher, I gained significant insights by simply watching and listening without interfering or participating. Commemorative public

events that occasionally took place within African-Caribbean heritage communities offered opportunities to rethink or complement findings on culture and history generated in the process of consideration of data found in secondary sources. My presence and opportunity to simply observe life in casual interactions enabled me to raise important arguments about subjective meanings and inner lives. In conjunction with this background research, interview data provided contextually grounded narratives within key parameters that theorise adult bereavement patterns within African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain.

In 'simple observations' (Kellehear, 1993) I often took into consideration symbolic acts and material culture like dress code, sense of humour, the conduct of casual conversations, mannerisms and identifications. I attended several events where participants were called to bring artefacts and talk about them and invited to narrate their life histories. When visiting personal spaces for interviews I was able to complement interview accounts with observations on the home environment of the interviewee.

For example, a participant for whom the experience of racism was particularly disturbing surrounded herself with symbols that she artistically reproduced. These artefacts were crucial to her on-going negotiations of the experience of racialization in Britain. I noticed in Mrs Helen's living room a male and a female doll and asked her about them. She informed me that they are called Golliwog and that she has been handcrafting and selling them. Mrs Helen explained that some people find them offensive and narrated an occasion when someone aggressively and publicly expressed disapproval of her initiative to recreate them, defying the initial objective of promoting equality in this act of violence towards her.

After a lifetime in England Mrs Helen was still struggling to come to terms with racism, and grieved the loss of opportunity to live harmoniously in the community. Artistic

representations provided significant insight to her on-going negotiations. Mrs Helen was the only research participant that did not want our interview to be audio-recorded. I spent a considerable amount of time with her during which I did not prompt her to talk about her experiences of bereavement in recognition of her vulnerability. The utilisation of observations in the context of ethnographic research enabled me to treat the encounter as theoretically significant and allowed me to deviate from my plan to ask questions about bereavement. Within a befriending encounter, I was able to appreciate the sense of generalised notions of loss in the diaspora. Ethnography expanded the range of concepts which are relevant to evolving interpretations, and a multi-method approach to data collection meant that all opportunities to collect data were appropriately used.

Observations in the context of African-Caribbean heritage communities constituted a purposeful activity driven by insights and questions raised in a variety of contexts and analytical exercises. The systematisation of signs and behaviour provide such analytical opportunities (Kellehear, 1993). Webb et al (1966) and Denzin (1970) indicate that we can do simple observations with exterior physical signs, expressive movement, physical location, language, behaviour, and time duration by observing their patterns and frequency. In my research I managed to fulfil this methodological objective by utilising data emanating from a range of sources. In this context, repeated patterns were identified, reported, and analysed. In addition, the reliability and validity of my findings was enhanced in methodological triangulation (Davidson and Layder, 1994).

### **Data analysis**

Care was taken to adopt a strategy to analysis that facilitates empathetic understanding, and highlights participant meanings. Grounded theory analysis is employed in order to



simultaneously and iteratively collect and analyse data, and progressively reveal participants' subjective meanings and interpretations. Findings then guide and inform further research during a single project. The benefits of using grounded theory analysis in this research is that it allows us to move beyond descriptive definition that has so far been the case with our understanding of bereavement in the context of diverse and varied ethnic minority experiences. African-Caribbean heritage rituals have primarily been the focus of intellectual conceptualisation. Grounded theory analysis also provides evidence-based research with the potential to reveal gaps in our knowledge or possible misunderstandings. The subjectivity of bereaved African-Caribbean heritage people is rarely perceived for its vulnerabilities towards loss as a social condition. The elaborate and culturally informed responses to death and dying are interpreted as mere resilience without references to the hardship from which they were born. Grounded theory can provide explanations starting from the subjectivity and personal accounts of the people whose experiences we are describing.

Grounded theory was discovered by Glaser and Strauss (1967[1999]) in the context of their research on nurses' emotional responses to death and dying in American hospitals. In grounded theory analysis the literature review is omitted in order to eliminate researcher bias and the influence of preconceived ideas. However, this principle is followed with varied degrees of precision and compliance. In this thesis, the literature review was essential to determine whether there is a valid topic to research. In preparing a literature review for a topic on which there is limited theorisation, I had to link and corroborate information and theories and consider experiences from multiple epistemological perspectives. In this respect, the two literature reviews are part of the process of initial theoretical development that helped to define directions and develop a language with which to communicate my research interests with participants, and phrase relevant questions. Grounded theory analysis

was still able to generate theory directly from the data because the topic is novel and significantly under-researched. Its conceptualisation contradicts understandings and theoretical paradigms.

Initial interview transcripts were broken down and analysed in a process called 'open coding'. The terms used to describe emergent themes remained close to the words employed by participants to describe and define their experiences. Observations and research in archival and other documentary sources were also transcribed or effectively summarised to enable processes of coding equivalent to those employed in the analysis of interviews. Codes were elaborated and defined in writing while regular journal entries recorded my thoughts and ideas about conceptual links that progressively moved my understanding towards greater abstraction and theoretical development. Quickly I developed the habit of making journal entries in public places in the middle of a busy schedule to capture insights and intuitive ideas.

With the progressive and episodic collection of data, codes grouped into categories such as those referring to 'social', 'cultural', 'compounded' and 'inflected' loss of homeland, a safe cultural location, respectability, personal and physical integrity, friendliness, desirability, safety, material comfort and stability, and other values that humanise experience. During selective coding I identified 'generalised' loss and 'acceptance' as dominant categories and decided to analyse data under the axis of race-class and gender because these seemed to define bereavement trajectories that included the properties within the developed analytical categories.

Kellehear (1993) employs the metaphor of poetry interpretation to talk about the process of thematic analysis. It requires repetitive readings of transcripts and the development of

creative and abstract ideas and hinges. It is not a simple task, and it is not uncommon among beginners to be unable to come up with any themes. As a solution to this problem Kellehear refers to Kern's (1970) suggestion which has much in common with semiotic analysis. Semiotic analysis does not take meanings articulated in the data at face value or for granted but puts them to the test in relation to other theories, contradictory ideas, other sets of data or even ideas that the researcher may have. Such a reflective consideration of analyses helped to produce new insights upon an evolving narrative that points towards alternative understandings of loss and different experiences of bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities. A generalised sense of loss that refers to a social condition of disadvantage and hardship proposes a cosmological perspective that includes mortality. Despite multiple instances that corroborate this view on life, participants find resilient responses within a culture of grief that organises adaptive responses to loss and bereavement.

## **Conclusion**

The evolving nature of theoretical insights on bereavement required reflexivity in the research process because it involved decision-making at various stages throughout the fieldwork and during analysis. Qualitative research, and especially ethnography is not structured or orderly, and reflexivity helps to refine plans during the research process. In this reflexive account of the method employed to research bereavement, I argued that questions raised in interviews guided further research in secondary sources and observations. However, in ethnographic research and grounded theory analysis the research process is neither linear nor straightforward. Research directions largely depended upon the needs of the evolving narrative and the questions that I needed to answer. Occasionally, it was clear where I had to look for data and at other times I just had to remain aware of the research questions that I needed to answer and look for clues and further directions. In this way,

anything that answered my questions within the context of ethnographic fieldwork could potentially become data.

## **Introduction to analysis**

The legacy of loss and culture of grief that shape bereavement experiences among people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain today is rooted within the historical legacy of slavery. The culture of death and grief was constructed and reproduced within interactions in the economic, political and cultural sphere of social organisation found in slave societies. The unequal nature of their social organisation has been described in historical literature (Craton, 1997; Walvin, 2001; Klein, 2010). It has also been analysed sociologically by Fenton (1999) and Rex (1983). Thereafter, in colonial and postcolonial contexts inequality was sustained by adaptations to a racialised discourse, modified to meet the social needs of each historical era (Fenton, 1999). A culture of grief - that accepts death and employs it as a lens to understand life and respond to challenging experiences - saturates African-Caribbean attitudes towards life and death. This is linked to the experience of oppression that started with slavery and was reproduced in competitive social contexts in the Western world. In these contexts as the various sources that comment upon slavery indicate (Curtin, 1968; Kiple and Kiple, 1977; Steckel, 1979; Miller, 1981; Manning, 1990; Klein and Engerman, 1997; Sheridan, 1985; Klein, Engerman, Haines and Shlomowitz, 2001) death and dying played an important role.

This thesis theorises experiences of bereavement influenced by historical relationship patterns within oppressive forms of social organisation. For this reason, in my analysis I will firstly spend time in chapters 4 and 5 to deconstruct the mechanisms that make up social organisation in slave and colonial societies and identify the psychological implications of oppression upon people of African-Caribbean heritage. I will then move on in chapter 6 to describe a culture of grief as I observed it in interactions with people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain. Finally, in chapters 7 and 8 I will analyse my participants' experiences

of bereavement, embedded within relationships shaped by historically reproduced unequal forms of social organisation. Continuing influences of a culture of grief inflect bereavement experiences and promote survival in what would otherwise have precarious circumstances. In the final chapter this thesis aims to theorise a process in which people of African-Caribbean heritage in the context of coping with grief promote change in their social lives. I will also explain how this is conducive to social change and transformation.

Before I embark upon analysis, I will make some clarifications to guide the reader. Firstly, the analysis presented in chapters 4 and 5 includes my theorisation of the structure of slave and colonial societies based upon library study and synthesis of relevant historical, cultural, and sociological literature. By conducting a review of the literature, I concluded that a materialist understanding of the formation of slave societies must be privileged. According to Williams (1944) slave societies were created to generate material wealth in the context of expansion of European capitalism. Settlement in the Caribbean required political organisation to protect vested economic interests. Culture was also shaped by popular racist stereotypes that supported and reinforced material inequality. Caribbean societies developed into complete societies with distinctive culture and social structure, the purpose of which was to sustain the capitalist motives of European powers (Trouillot, 1992). The legacy of this type of social organisation shapes the experience of people of African-Caribbean heritage in the Western world today, and affects many areas of life, one of which is death, dying and bereavement. In order to support my argument, I will analyse a marginal experience that has been neglected in the literature. The latter will involve consideration of the psychological implications of the interaction between racial and gender stereotypes used to sustain and reproduce inequality in historical perspective. Literature has focused either upon structural or psychological consequences of inequality, but in this thesis I will consider the implications of their interrelationship. This will serve the purpose of locating

bereavement experiences within social structure, and identifying the role of agency, culture and social interactions in coping with loss and promoting social change.

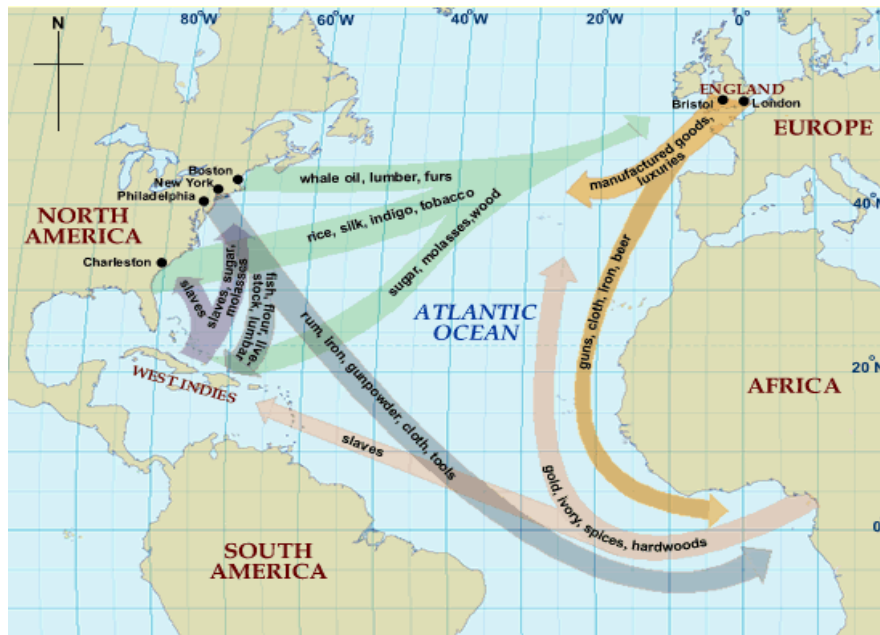
My analysis oscillates between theorisation of the structural aspects of the experience of slaves and their descendants and an attempt to deconstruct inner lives and subjectivities. In analysing experiences of bereavement among research participants I employ the same approach. Chapter 6 focuses upon existential understandings and is mostly based upon an analysis of the cultural and inner experience of people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain to rationalise their attitudes towards death and loss. Chapters 7 and 8 are based upon a structural analysis that identifies relationship patterns and interactions within social organisation which determine the course of bereavement.

African-Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom in the 1950's and further diasporisation in the Western world was the outcome of this interplay between structural and inner aspects of experience. According to Hall (1988) Caribbean migration to the UK was not a random isolated event, but the outcome of a series of interactions and relationships that started with the 'triangular slave trade' and kept Britain, Africa and the Caribbean colonies connected and inter-dependent.

*'The ships that left England for the west coast and western interior of Africa loaded with commercial and manufactured goods, then took large numbers of African slaves across the Atlantic "middle passage" into the plantation settlements of the Caribbean islands and North and South America, whence they took sugar and other commodities back to England. The flow and character of this trade not only transformed Caribbean cultures and economies but also came to symbolize a*

continuing pattern of dependency between colonized regions and metropolitan centres.'

(Hall, 1988: 264)



Picture: Map adapted from the National Archives (2003) *Black Presence: The Triangular Trade*.

Although we might immediately observe the material elements in Hall's interpretation of interdependency, the concept that he proposes is incomplete without taking into consideration the emotive factors of migration. His argument suggests that migration was the result of relationships of profit and subordination, as well as, established interactional and cultural patterns shaped by shared identifications. This means that the nature of societies that economic activity gave rise to, contributed to the continuation of unequal racialised economic relationships, and their transplantation to different contexts in Western societies. And due to the radical disparities of resources and power people of African-Caribbean



heritage were drawn to the metropolitan colonial centres. Socialisation and the internalisation of social stereotypes influenced peoples' self-perceptions and identities, perpetuated an uneven social arrangement and reproduced relations of inequality that kept drawing the parties involved to each another. In this respect, migration was the outcome of economic and political relationships and structures that utilised material and emotive means to achieve their objectives.

Finally, there is an additional level of analysis which is linked to the one described so far. The cause-and-effect relationship between structure and agency and the interplay between inner and material aspects of experience reproduce history and create patterns. Patterns are never identical but have the same origin (Foucault, 2001). For this reason, in chapter 5 I talk about the continuing influence of racialised structures and stereotypes, and identify similarities that lie in the economic, political, and cultural links that connect experiences.

In post-slavery colonial Caribbean black people were no longer enslaved but remained subordinate because structural inequality continued while former white colonisers tried to maintain power and privileges (Craon, 1988). The power of stereotypes is highlighted during this period because subordination was largely voluntary. Colonial ideals of whiteness and myths about black peoples' racial inferiority were once more internalised by black Caribbeans, who were led to believe that they could improve their social position if they embraced British cultural ideals (Fanon, 2006a&b). The experience of African-Caribbean migrants in Britain was shaped by the discrepancy between favourable views that they kept about their 'Motherland', and the hostility that they actually experienced when they arrived to settle and recreate their lives.

Migration signalled yet another era of transformational changes, and although people of African-Caribbean heritage favour integration and inclusion, racism remains an issue. This is also the reason for which a culture of grief survived, connecting experiences in transhistorical perspective. Changing forms of racial subordination and repeated disappointment and loss cultivated and elaborated a culture of grief that originates in contexts of slavery.

To justify the relationship between past and present and defend the culture of grief thesis I had to refer to a part of Caribbean history in the West. However, the reproducible nature of historical experience makes it to a certain extent predictable, and it is this predictability that will help us to deconstruct bereavement. Foucault (2001) talked about the tendency of historical knowledge to repeat itself in a context of modernity's discontinuities in his book *The Order of Things*. The same patterns in social organisation and relationships survive because they adapt and change to serve purposes of hegemonic power and economic control. For this reason, it is not their perceived similarity that connects them but how they adapt to new contexts and changed circumstances:

*'...the general area of knowledge is no longer that of identities and differences...but an area made up of organic structures, that is, of internal relations between elements whose totality performs a function; it will show that these organic structures are discontinuous, that they do not, therefore, form a table of unbroken simultaneities, but that certain of them are on the same level whereas others form series or linear sequences...the link between one organic structure and another can no longer, in fact, be the identity of one or several elements, but must be the identity of the relation between the elements (a relation in which visibility no longer plays a role), and of the function they perform.'*

Within this framework, I theorise relationships of economic competition, political hegemony and related cultural identifications - expressed in traditions and narratives such as those surrounding death - reproduce historical experiences even when they appear discontinuous and involve multiple and unique contexts. In the same way, we can – to a certain extent - conceptualise the diversity of experiences in the Western world black diaspora, in which one is still able to discern similarities. The institution of slavery and subsequent patterns of disadvantage shared similar organisation across the Western world, and therefore, societies, their development and cultural production follow parallel processes and share meanings.

In a Foucauldian conceptualisation of history, it is not necessary to narrate events in chronological order because it is not always possible to establish linearity in the sequence and succession of historical eras. For this reason, it is important to refer only to those aspects of history linked by reproduced economic, political, and cultural relationships in unequal forms of social organisation and emphasise their implications for the experience that concerns this thesis. This research focuses upon boundaries and explores links between discontinuous histories and epistemological perspectives. Mortality in the black experience in the Western world is of primary importance and plays a role in the preservation of community cohesion and culture that counteract deceptively discontinuous patterns of inequality in historical perspective. Therefore, it is important to study the complexity of transhistorical patterns in order to understand an experience with a long tradition and continuing significance. Chapters 4 and 5 are largely historical and refer to those aspects of slavery, pre-migration colonial history and migration experience in Britain that shape the experience of death for people of African-Caribbean heritage. The rest of the analytical chapters are informed by the preceding analysis and deconstruct basic bereavement patterns.



## Chapter 4

### Social structure and race in slave societies

#### Introduction

In this chapter I evaluate the role that constructions of race play in positioning slaves as subordinate and servile in a context of economic competition centred upon the capitalisation of the resources and opportunities that British colonisation in the New World offered during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such an analytical inquiry is vital to the purposes of this thesis because the interplay between racial stereotypes and structural inequality established the preconditions that incorporated notions of suffering and loss into the worldview of slaves. The latter cultivated a culture of grief that inflects experiences of bereavement with a resilience born out of interactions with racism. The combination of structural inequality - primarily defined by complete material deprivation and lack of freedom among slaves - and a culture and a way of life stereotyped as inferior, meant that grief was everyday experience for slaves, and defined the ways in which they thought and felt about themselves. This thesis is claiming that feelings of incompleteness and structural limitations in the lives of slaves reinforced relationship patterns that present issues in historical perspective and impact upon bereavement experiences.

At the outset I would like to explain how I use 'race' in my analysis. Race in this thesis is a useful analytical category that influenced participants' lives and experiences of bereavement. It is a concept that has been theorised in sociological literature, but for the purposes of this thesis, it is mainly an analytical tool that I aim to elaborate upon with reference to slave societies and postcolonial contexts. My efforts towards theoretical development are oriented

towards bereavement for which race highlights as a social relationship. Experiences of bereavement mark transformation in the lives of the bereaved, and race plays a key role, because bereavement involves a reappraisal of racialised positions and experiences and their renegotiation.

Bereavement involves asking existential questions that deconstruct deep-seated social relationships, which can only be explained with reference to the analysis of historical relationships and social organisation. The analysis of racialised structural relationships in historical perspective provides a good explanation of why people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain reorganise within gendered frameworks, in order to resist the structural conditions that cause suffering and grief. Racial and gendered categories were constructed in slave societies through processes of social stereotyping that confirmed and maintained structural inequality and exploitation. Such ideological categories are themselves saturated with notion of loss and suffering. Their reproduction in historical perspective serves to create a culture of grief. In the effort to adapt and cope with inequality and stigmatisation, slaves developed 'creole' cultural frameworks. In contemporary societies we refer to the transmutation of this form of identification as cultural hybridity. In hybrid identifications loss, racism and inequality are defining experiences that influence attitudes, behaviour and philosophical viewpoints.

Death, dying and bereavement are experiences that involve the analysis of multiple racialised relationships. I advance five reasons to explain this complexity:

1. Bereavement reappraises the past and negotiates it in relation to the present in order to promote change in the life of the bereaved. It, therefore, involves the appraisal of early modernist frameworks of social organisation within contexts that provide

opportunities of multiplicity in advanced and/or postmodern societies. To understand the issues and problems affecting their lives, the bereaved will explore older forms of social organisation that have been largely transcended. In current societies, this provides opportunities for creativity and cultural hybridity with dynamic potential for transcending or at least transforming loss.

2. Racism and social disadvantage maintain the relevance of unequal forms of social organisation in describing social life, because the scarcity of resources that gave rise to divided identities and categories in early industrial societies remains a central organisational factor. In modern and post-industrial societies people continue to sell their labour in non-manual sectors and in skilled occupations in return for earnings. In this context, class, race and gender are central organisational principles, along which resources are differentially distributed.

In advanced societies, science, technology, and accumulated wealth interact to change attitudes. Social mobility increases reflexivity (Beck, 1992), and in the process, people revise their identities. Stable formations and categories are no longer permanent, and society is organised in network relationships that span across the globe. In these contexts, people maintain multiple identities not necessarily tied to work, nation, race or gender categories. Risks cut across previously stable categories and they are physical, social and psychological, which means that they are also transnational. However, older categories of race, class and gender still exercise influence in contexts where inequality persists. Ethnic minority communities maintain low socio-economic profiles, and for this reason, family, ancestry, and community serve transhistorical purposes.

Nonetheless, African-Caribbean heritage communities celebrate the unique potential of postmodernism in cultural hybridity that according to Rex (1979) represents the 'politics of defensive confrontation'. Dispossessed communities that identify with a legacy of slavery historically found new possibilities of existing in doubleness and contradiction (Du Bois, 2011). This is an enabling strategy that defies structural inequalities if only symbolically. This mode of identification informs analysis because loss experienced disproportionately and in multiple ways, and continuing disadvantage is a central experience that mobilises adaptation. The organisation of postmodern societies through multiplicity, certainly benefits and provides additional options for disadvantaged communities not afforded safety within the stability of earlier and current social structures. Responses to risk through communitarian politics of resistance do not undermine awareness of flexibility in identity and identifications and the transformational potential that these have.

3. Although bereavement is universal, it is also largely an age-related experience. Most of the participants in this research are older and middle-aged. This demography presents directly analysis productively staged within modernist frameworks. Some participants had direct experience of colonial societies in their lives, while all had experienced racialised social exclusion in Britain. While hybridity offered unique opportunities to cut across boundaries for all participants, social inequalities limited choice and the freedom of cosmopolitanism. Further research in metropolitan centres and with younger samples would possibly benefit from additional analytical concepts that add to the findings presented in this thesis.
4. Ethnographic research is holistic and describes a range of experiences that benefit from a range of theoretical interpretative tools. Racialised relationships are complex.



Limited by unequal social structures, people find novel solutions to enable themselves and their communities to live with difference. Hybridity, in this respect, refers to exceptional circumstances where people consciously negotiate contradictions, but still engage with stable forms of organisation which they cannot take for granted. This creates a different form of anti-essentialist social awareness and remains the same but is inherently different in that it remains open to prospects of development, expansion and redefinition.

5. Finally, analysis is limited by the available range of theoretical concepts that explain bereavement experiences. The sociological definition of bereavement is largely person-focused and lacks contextual basis. Specifically, in relation to ethnic minority communities there is limited understanding of the dynamic interplay of structures, relationships, identities and identifications. For this purpose, I needed to conduct basic deconstruction of the above. The prospect of cosmopolitanism is certainly there but focus upon loss and its relationship to social disadvantage requires us to turn our gaze towards the structural limitations that prevent transformation through transnational politics of identification for people living in the periphery. A focus upon movement would still produce person-focused and acontextual accounts and work to obscure structures of disadvantage evidenced in historical perspective.

Fenton's (1999) understanding of the organisational role of race in society as an ideological construct observed in economic, political and social/cultural relationships is useful for our purposes. Solomos and Back (1994) argued that attempts to theoretical development focused upon structure have now been transcended by others that emphasise agency and culture. However, structural inequalities persist, and one should be able to evaluate the unique

interdependent factors at play and examine their interrelationships in any given context in order to describe a situated experience.

Solomos and Back (1994) argue that racism needs to be placed within its moment of enunciation, because there is a variety of coded signifiers, or 'metonymic elaborations' as they call them, which may express racism. Banton (1991) argued that different theoretical paradigms contribute their own distinctive accounts of processes, which involve the attribution of specific meanings to racial situations. The objective is then to position paradigms in relation to each other and to political debates over what could or should be the focus of analysis (Solomos and Back, 1994: 156).

In this thesis, race is treated as a social construct that has been historically employed within an evolving discourse to organise society unequally. As the example below indicates, for participants of this research race is highly consequential and makes references to real rather than perceived differences. This is something that cannot be ignored for ethical reasons. The objective here is not to advance our intellectual understanding of race and racism and expand related concepts and theories, but to describe experiences of disadvantage, loss, grief and bereavement. In this respect, the deconstruction of constructions of race and gender within unequal forms of social organisation is analytically useful.

Theories that emphasise the continuing importance of unequal social structures in postmodern societies do not reify categories, identities or structures, and therefore, do not present a counter-productive analytical practice. This research indicated that race is still a form of difference where skin colour plays a role in social interactions. Loss as a generalised experience in the lives of disadvantaged populations represents a time when these sentiments are highlighted. The author Andrea Levy negotiated her consciousness of her identity as a

black person within a reflective process upon the theme of loss, social disadvantage and bereavement. Mrs Helen emphasised that in social interactions the colour of your skin matters. Social disadvantage concerned her, and she emphasised social attitudes towards phenotype. Acknowledgement of the continuing impact of relationships shaped by various forms of difference, including phenotype, does not essentialise race. It only enables us to focus upon the structural conditions and cultural interpretations that reveal external pressures, as well as, inner motives and negotiations at play at time of loss and reorganisation.

Saldanha (2006) borrowing from observations on animals, ecology and biology demonstrates that phenotype need not be static or given but ‘emergent’ and subject to trajectories, communications, integrations and synergies. She proposes the reinstatement of race as ‘culturally embedded phenotype’:

*‘Saying that race has no place in biology is different from saying that phenotype plays some role in racial differentiation. Phenotype is a crucial element in the assemblage called race, and, because phenotype is already non discrete and shaped by culture, race cannot be an essentialist concept.’*

(Saldanha, 2006: 20)

In African-Caribbean heritage experiences race has meaning and plays a role in social organisation, culture and interactions. Throughout history racism has changed, along with peoples’ perceptions, attitudes and experience of it. After initial data analysis, race was highlighted as central for its role within social organisation and influence upon interactions and relationships, as well as for its intersections with gender inequalities. In studies where

race plays organisational role theoretical development is a matter of context rather than paradigm.

## **Social organisation**

### ***Race and capitalism in British Caribbean slavery***

Caribbean societies came together for the sole purpose of generating material wealth for European colonisers and the countries they represented. For this reason, their social structure was simple, defined by inequality and extreme disparities of power between the white elite, on one hand, and the slave majority, on the other. The social structure of Caribbean colonies is best conceptualised in a form of a hierarchy with white people at the top as owners of capital such as land, plantations and slaves - or alternatively as overseers or other paid professionals and labourers - and black people occupying the bottom of the hierarchy supporting an economic system that excluded them, but at the same time, preoccupied them in physical, intensive and unpaid labour in the plantations of the New World (Craton, 1997). Informal privileges and hierarchies divided slaves internally (Craton, 1997), often on the basis of skin tone with lighter complexion associated with greater ability and opportunities (Walvin, 2001). Broadly speaking, in the context of slave societies social structure was defined by class divisions organised by race as phenotype and as a social and ideological construct.

The tendency within historical and anthropological literature is to explain slavery in terms of capitalist development and modernisation (Williams, 1944; Walvin, 2001; Craton, 1997; Palmie, 1996a; Klein, 2010). This is because the emergent nature of colonial societies demonstrates a profit-making drive through its industrial mode of agricultural crop

production, its rigid and unequal class structure and the commodification of slaves. More specifically, Trouillot (1992) points out that slave owners and traders held a perception of 'use value' for their slaves, and Palmie (1996b) claims that such a consumer attitude towards humans is constructed, acquired and learned. If slaves had to go through a period of 'seasoning' to the cycles, structures and demands of plantation life in the Caribbean, so did the white proprietors whose challenge was to get accustomed to the idea that humans can be seen and treated as commodities. The only way to function within this system was to construct African slaves as 'Other' non-humans, and assign them within a growing culture of consumption and changing cultural attitudes and practices.

The development of capitalism explains attitudes towards slavery and racialization, but as Fenton argues (1999: 71) 'to stick too closely to such an argument can look like a search for a once-and-for-all answer to the question "where does racism come from"?' (1999: 72). He adds that 'in reality there were many forms of categorical thinking in which 'Others' were constructed as different and inferior because European expansion and the spread of capitalism across the world necessitated the hardening of racist ideologies'. Eltis (1993) also argues that relationships of inequality between black and white people can be explained by the human encounter with 'difference', which takes us back to the discussion on race and the significance of phenotype, only to confirm it. Racialisation in the form of 'Othering' featured since antiquity in non-Western capitalist contexts. Fenton (1999: 83-86) gives us the example of Dikotter (1992) who argued that in China racial attitudes towards skin colour and physical characteristics existed since antiquity.

Race as a form of difference serves to arrange relationships unequally in contexts of competition between diverse groups of people. Capitalism constructed race and racism, but the relationship mainly represents competing interests served by the organisation of

difference. Despite the ideological nature of relationships, capitalism is useful conceptually to our understanding of slavery. The material significance of capitalism was too great to ignore. According to Walvin (2001) modernisation in Europe would have been impossible without the hard work of slaves in the New World plantations. The latter justified the enslavement of humans at a time when racial thinking was shaped by stereotypical thinking.

For our purposes it would be adequate to suggest that Atlantic slavery was the outcome of synchronisation and timing between simultaneous processes: Europe was involved in capitalist development and modernisation; explorers found fertile lands in the Americas that they could capitalise, and an African slave trade already existed that they could take advantage of. All these elements coupled by the fact that Africans could be constructed as 'different' and exploited with race as justification (Eltis, 1993), explain slavery which represents a pre-modern form of organisation amidst efforts to progress and develop (*see Hall in Loomba, 1998: 131*). Modernisation was a process that involved contradictory tendencies. The social structure of slave societies reflected these general trends and involved no more than the exploitation of slaves in mechanistic agricultural units that resemble modern industrial modes of production. The aim was to generate wealth, development and progress in metropolitan centres and transnational European market economies (Craton, 1997, Walvin, 2001, Klein, 2010).

### ***Social death and revival in dying***

To reinforce economic relationships of subordination, slaves were denied formal political recognition and were defined exclusively by their master's ownership over them. For this reason, Patterson (1982) characterised their social experience as 'social death'. At the same time, they were disenfranchised under conditions of constant threat towards their lives in

harsh work regimes that involved murderous punishments under diseased environments (Curtin, 1968; Steckel, 1979; Mason, 1986; Klein and Engerman, 1997; Sheridan, 1985; Klein, Engerman, Haines and Shlomowitz, 2001). Their activity and opportunities were limited to an informal and internal community-centred mode of social organisation that focused upon resistance and survival (Patterson, 1982).

There is evidence that slaves - especially women – towards the end of slavery pioneered in an informal economy based upon agricultural production of crops and cattle that they sold in Sunday markets in order to better themselves, buy small luxuries and cope with the problems of starvation and food shortages (Craton, 1997; Walvin, 2001, Klein, 2010). In the struggle for survival and freedom there were also community leaders – usually spiritual leaders - that protected, guided and represented their communities to the authorities (Walvin, 2001: 153-170). Families, kin networks and communities with clearly defined structures, and creole cultures also emerged to cope with the demanding circumstances flexibly and adaptively. Despite there being evidence of cultural revival and creativity (Walvin, 2001; Klein, 2010; Heuman & Walvin, 2003; Palmie, 1996a; Inikori and Engerman, 1992), Patterson's thesis on slavery and social death is valid. Their cultures and communities served survival purposes and were born out of loss and trauma.

Anthropologists and historians (Walvin, 2001; Klein, 2010; Heuman & Walvin, 2003; Palmie, 1996a; Inikori and Engerman, 1992) describe customs, rituals, celebrations, modes of social organisation and creative new traditions that defied slavery's dehumanisation. On the more abstract level of identifications, cultural hybridity and creolisation started in slavery (Craton, 1997) in order to cope with the rapid transformations of social life and constant threats to slaves' existential security. They represent inner processes of people who have been forcibly expelled from their comfort zone, and pushed to create meaning out of

suffering and disenfranchisement. There are accounts from death camp survivors and death studies theorists that capture the way in which people construct meaning out of their interactions with death, dying and grief (Noys, 2005; Frankl, 2004). Slaves reproduced community and life by dying, and in death ritual practices (Brown, 2008) that revived culture and reinvented identities. These are attitudes that indicate an alternative understanding of mortality, one that accepts and includes the experience in reproducing social life. They survived because hybridity cultivated in interactions with loss employs flexibility and adaptation strategies in order to promote continuity in life-threatening circumstances.

In slave societies violent death represented the main threat to life, but was also slaves' ally in symbolically reproducing social life and promoting political emancipation in hybridised death rituals. The celebratory character of ancestral African death rituals was employed to serve purposes of resistance against slavery. Cultural expression contradicted the generalised sentiment of mourning, suffering and grief, and in this way, resisted dehumanisation. Death signalled the beginning of a new phase in the lives of slaves, in which they would be freed to return to motherland African, and join a family of dead ancestors. In this respect, life was reconstituted, providing the bereaved with a vision and an ideal for a future in the afterlife that gave them hope, and helped them survive in servitude.

The 'liminality' of the encounter (Van Gennep, 2004) in slave funerals coupled by vibrant celebrations, decisively asserted a marginalised experience that did not concern the wider society, but at this point, it could not be ignored, giving further power and authority to slaves in charge of the ritual processions. The presence of the corpse proved their human nature to masters who stepped back and observed the ritual proceedings and even provided the raw material needed for their performance (Walvin, 2001 132-133; Genovese, 1972). Cleansing



rituals meant to atone the soul of the deceased (Brown, 2008: 66-69), at the same time as they served and communicated claims to justice.

Cultural creativity in the context of death rituals represented slaves' political views and positions in a context of political and economic subordination. It also reflected their inner life and perspective on the meaning of life and death. According to Frankl (2004) art and expressive forms communicate love and compassion that give hope and promote survival under dehumanising and dangerous circumstances. Creative death rituals served such purposes for bereaved slave communities. Frankl (2004) who experienced the trauma and dehumanisation of Holocaust inmate life perceived that survival in death camps was dependent upon the ability to maintain hope in a context that alienated and detached human beings from their emotional experiences. Artistic creativity, spirituality, love and compassion were central adaptive strategies that mobilise the powerful potential of the human soul, which cannot be captured. The same psychological processes describe the attitude towards life and death shared by slaves. The express subjective valuations of life ordinarily constructed as meaningless. Towards this end, they accept mortality and value relationships that cross the boundaries of life and death.

Slaves survived by adopting a perspective that treats life as ephemeral. Having to create life out of bare existence (Noys, 2005) they relied upon whatever resources were conducive to survival. In family, kin and community organisation, for example, their identifications with Western ideals came second to the purposes of survival served better by hybrid modes of social organisation, combining both nuclear and extended – including polygynous - family frameworks (Walvin, 2001; Craton, 1997). However, it was within spiritual expression, frequently in the context of death rituals, that they were mostly able to express defiantly the essence of their experience and political views. Death revived life by re-incorporating love,

humanity and compassion into slave experience, at the same time as it asserted powerful political messages and negotiated power relationships (Brown, 2008).

Caution should be exercised in celebrating death in black cultures and communities, because it may divert attention away from the problems of inequality and exploitation that initially gave rise to such cultural understandings. Further, acceptance of death and its utilisation in social organisation implies struggle. To this day, death, dying and grieving in African-Caribbean heritage communities remains largely an adaptive strategy, albeit an effective one. In this section we have seen that an integral part of slavery, death, organised cultures of resistance and sustained social life. It is, therefore, of paramount importance in understanding experiences of bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities in historical perspective.

## **Culture**

### ***Power and social stereotypes***

In the Caribbean islands, sugar monocultural production dominated economic activity. The potential for wealth generation from the sales of sugar in European markets was too great, and changed peoples' consumption attitudes (Walvin, 2001). The opportunity attracted investment into the Caribbean and encouraged settlement of various parties involved in the agricultural production and management of sugar cultivation. Owners, overseers, traders, craftsmen, other business persons and slaves all played a role in the production process. The presence of diversity and the function of the colonies transformed them into 'complete' societies (Craton, 1997) with their own social organisation and culture.

Property and economic interests required protection provided by the creation of oligarchic political systems centred upon sugar monocultural production, known as plantocracies (Craton, 1997). Only plantation owners had power in decision-making, and institutions protected their interests alone. Plantocracies as political systems were formed and organised around sugar monocultural production, in units that followed industrial principles, profited from the exploitation of slave labour, and offered the privilege of ‘total’ control (Craton, 1997: 150). The imposition of power was enforced by the use of violence by overseer workers, owners and in occasions of revolt by organised militia (Paton, 2001; Brown, 2008).

However, it was the ability of the plantocratic system to promote racist ideologies and stereotypes about the perceived inferiority of black slaves that most effectively asserted power, by shaping popular perceptions and values. Racist ideologies influenced slaves’ self-perceptions and made them exploitable in a system that dehumanised them. Slaves’ impoverished existence and violated lives stood in direct contrast to the lavish lifestyle and opportunities that white owners enjoyed (Walvin, 2001), leading to the internalisation of racist stereotypes. The comprehensive nature of plantocracies, and the impact of total control upon slaves has been analysed by Trouillot (1992: 22) in the following passage:

*‘As a form of labour organization, the plantation is an agricultural enterprise, distinguished by its massive use of coerced or semi-coerced labour, producing agricultural commodities for markets situated outside of the economy within which the plantation itself operates...the plantation is an economic institution, and an agricultural unit operating with an industrial dynamic. It is also...a settlement institution, in the sense that it arranges people in a “new” territory: a political institution, inasmuch as it operates as a small state, with an authoritarian structure. Plantation owners claim a monopoly of violence, control over the life of the people*

*who inhabit the plantation. The plantation is, finally, a cultural institution. It tends to generate a distinguishable way of life for owners and workers alike, but it also divides them along racial and ethnic lines. It is a race-making institution.'*

Rex (1973, 1983) also saw colonial institutions as classic contexts of race and ethnic making, and explained their organisation in terms of the differentiation of pluralistic contexts where implicit or explicit theories of race justify inequality (*see Rex in Fenton, 1999: 22*). Fenton (1999) warns that in Rex's conceptualisation race' can be conflated with a special type of social relationship when in reality racialisation is always embedded within wider economic, political and social relationships.

Although attention has been drawn towards patterns of inequality and social structures in which race is a central organisational factor, processes of stereotyping and associated psychological implications have more recently been brought under academic scrutiny. Paton (2001) explains how the bodies of slaves were being used as means to acquiring control and power through punishment. Brown (2008) also illustrates how the tortured bodies of dead slaves were exhibited and used to threaten in an aggressive game of competition for power and hegemony. Patterson (1982: 1-2) conceptualises physical violence and symbolic whipping as one of the two ways in which race and stereotypes of inferiority were used to alienate and in this way to subordinate slaves. The other was the 'capacity to persuade another person to change the way he perceives his interests and his circumstances' often by acquiring control of 'private and public symbols and ritual processes that induce (and seduce) people to obey because they feel satisfied and dutiful when they do so'. Punishment and consistent psychological harassment and comparison shaped slave experience and undermined their ability to resist oppression.

The limited range of accounts on the impact of the means used to enslave upon the inner lives of slaves can be attributed to the dominance of white voices in first-person accounts directly reporting upon slavery. There is also reservation within academia to deal with abstract evidence that cannot be corroborated. Finally, there is apprehension in deconstructing the issue of racialization and its effects upon black people from fear of repeating and reinforcing old or new prejudices. However, this is a necessary endeavour if we are to understand the social problems that black communities in the Western world are facing today. Consideration of the impact of race and racism upon slaves will demonstrate that cultural racism or stereotyping is not new phenomenon. It will also link structural and cultural processes of racialization by highlighting their discursive interactions that promote their persistence and continuity, but also change and transformation towards a more de-essentialising framework. Increased awareness in the context of historical understanding will enhance the rationalisation of subjectivity of racialised communities and support reflexive communication. In the context of bereavement research, the analytical approach employed will describe the structural adaptations made as people negotiate cultural references and interrogate stereotypes and assumptions.

### ***Race and the inner-life of slaves***

Racialisation involved the development of a discourse, which was based upon racialised assumptions about the nature of black people that justified their enslavement and reinforced subordination (Fenton, 1999). Perceived difference acquired negative connotations and constructed popular ideologies, articulated and elaborated in everyday interactions that arranged economic and political structures unequally. This discourse positioned slaves as inferior, uncivilised and incapable of participating in complex forms of social organisation. Such perceptions saturated culture and values and shaped ways in which people felt about themselves.

During slavery the experience of slaves stem from narratives that constructed them as naïve, childish, effeminate, happy-go-lucky and unintellectual or lacking in ability to be involved in expansionist enterprises and financial exchanges (Stamp, 1971; Elkins, 1976). Slaves' self-perception was conditioned accordingly because violence in everyday life and contrast in material conditions between luxury, on one hand, and complete deprivation, on the other, affirmed stereotypes. Although aware of exploitation, which they found unfair and communicated to their oppressors through symbolic acts of sabotage (Walvin, 2001), references to essential inferiority was conducive to alienation and doubt.

Frankl (2004: 36) with reference to the experience of Holocaust prisoners argues that 'the most painful part of beatings is the insult which they imply', and during slavery racialisation permeated culture and perceptions in two ways: through violence and verbal insults, and usually both (Patterson, 1982). Violence had a degrading objective that intended to dehumanise and diminish the recipients. Coming to terms with this was undermined by a servile social status. Slaves were no different to Holocaust prisoners in that they could not escape, and had to work 12 hour days, malnourished, in insanitary conditions.

Violence, poverty and lack of meaning in life confirmed dominant prejudices. Slaves felt accountable to such a discourse that impacted upon internal relationships and community organisation. Stereotypes and narratives made sense as explanations of their social position because they nothing in their degrading and dehumanising existence pointed to the contrary. Slaves had to rely upon more sophisticated, abstract and existential meanings in order to express and assert their value and worth.

Lack of meaning in life can lead to rapid decline and death, but it is almost always possible to find meaning in love because despite suffering the human soul cannot be captured (Frankl, 2004). As anthropologists (Walvin, 2001; Klein, 2010; Heuman & Walvin, 2003; Palmie, 1996a&b; Inikori and Engerman, 1992) demonstrate slaves soon found purpose in community, family, kinship, new relationships and culture, which means that collectively and intergenerationally they were developing their own identity, and with it hope for and the desire actively participate in social life. Still existence had limited meaning beyond its identifications with survival, but they were resisting, and in this sense, culture is a form of defiance (Palmie, 1996b). Death, more than anything else, had empowering and meaning-making potential, and offered opportunities for identification and resistance (Brown, 2008). Trauma and loss according to Frankl (2004: 100) feels like wisdom gained through hardship, where life and its challenges stop being unfamiliar or surprising. This brings people in contact with spirituality.

*‘The crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear any more – except his God.’*

Meaning and opportunity found in loss and suffering did not eradicate problems but promoted gradual emancipation and development, while it reinforced resilience and survival. This is because slavery undermined black peoples’ self-perceptions, internal solidarity and collective identifications that preserve continuous memory. Systematic dehumanisation spoiled slaves’ efforts to recreate community. They were being repeatedly uprooted and families were divided to eliminate any possibility of organisation against the economic interests of the white minority master class (Walvin, 2001). In addition, there were efforts to intentionally undermine the formation of kinship-based communities and destroy cultural

systems (Morgan, 1997). In this context of repeatedly disrupted lives, slaves could not mobilise to recreate and restore life fully. Survival, the search for food, and escape from danger became priority, and the main life-sustaining life force. Relationships were difficult to establish because slaves originating from different African regions were often mixed to prevent resistance, and new bonds were often interrupted by death and the re-sale of slaves (Curtin, 1968; Lovejoy, 1982). Morgan (1997: 134) argued that with ‘individuals being kidnapped, sold, resold, and captured again in the course of repeatedly disrupted lifetimes’, their tribal identities probably meant ‘very little’ to them.

Although the Middle Passage and seasoning survivors restored culture and community, they lacked positive identification with a collective category because they were racialised. In this way, emptied and stripped down to a core dehumanised existence they were easy to re-socialise into the plantation system and its needs. ‘Seasoning’ refers to the process by which slaves are introduced into the cycles of agriculture, but also the way in which they learn their role of servitude (Craton, 1997). ‘Resistance’ – direct and indirect – was strong among slaves (Palmie, 1996b), but adaptation was inevitable (Craton, 1997). And the latter meant that slaves, to a certain extent, adopted their masters’ culture and entered their world and meanings. This was the only ‘positive’ identification that they could develop in order to maintain hope for a life in the future. The other was in an afterlife that transported them back to African from where they were stolen and uprooted.

Violence in everyday life and material contrast between slaves and masters equally asserted cultural values that privileged masculinist ideals. It was intended that slaves identify with these values and desires, but being structurally excluded from society, never to be able to reach out to those aspirations. Lacking positive role models that would enable them to develop meaning and future aspiration, it was only logical for slaves to look to their superiors



in order to construct their ideals and define their hopes. The discrepancy between reality and aspiration occupied the realm of fantasy but also hope, kept slaves under control and reinforced subordination, obedience and respect for authority. Slaves' purpose was to serve white peoples' material interests, and they would never be allowed anything different (Fenton, 1999).

Slaves' attitude towards their masters was contradictory characterised by lack of respect on one hand, and admiration on the other (Walvin, 2001: 112-113). Slaves would ridicule, trick, humiliate and caricature white people, but on the other hand, they had to identify and share similar ideals because they lacked personal identifications that come from positions of power and free existence.

Studies on the inner lives of contemporary black people in the West point to the perpetuation of internal dilemmas and incommensurate tendencies. Eng & Han (2003), Cheng (2001), Luciano (2003) and Moynagh (2008) came up with the notion of 'racial melancholia' to refer to the experience of grief and melancholia for what racialised people can never become. Emphasis is placed upon the "unattainable goal of whiteness" (Eng and Han, 2003) that reinforces their sense of incompleteness and internal loss (Luciano, 2003). Although it may seem that phenotypical difference encourages melancholia, whiteness is a social representation of a particular way of life which black people aspire but cannot attain. These identification processes start very early in life. Characteristically, Clark and Clark (1950) carried out experiments with black children and concluded that socialisation into racist stereotypes creates developmental problems. Children identify with ideals they are excluded from, and for which they experience inner conflicts.

The outward manifestation of inner conflicts and doubts was behaviour that undermined relationships and community solidarity. For example, slave women that identified with an ideal of whiteness would try to reproduce with white men in order to advance socially, by climbing the ladder defined by a hierarchy based upon skin tone (Walvin, 2001: 115). Andrea Levy in her novel *The Long Song*<sup>7</sup> set in a Jamaican plantation society poetically represents the experience when her heroine July (house slave) interacts with Miss Clara who is a quadroon (almost white), and a former slave. Miss Clara organises dances intended as meeting places between lighter skin female slaves and white men and July is interested in attending those functions. The author in July's voice explains the hierarchy of skin colour when every generation that mates with a white person is getting a step further towards achieving whiteness, and therefore, respect and status free from the stigma of inferiority.

*'Only with a white man, can there be guarantee that the colour of your pickney will be raised. For a mulatto who breeds with a white man will bring forth a quadroon; and the quadroon that enjoys white relations will give to this world a mustee; the mustee will beget a mustiphino; and the mustiphino... oh, the mustiphino's child with a white man for a papa, will find each day greets them no longer with a frown, but welcomes them with a smile, as they at last stride within this world as a cherished white person.'*

(Levy, 2010a: 187)

---

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Levy meticulously researched historical sources in order to write her historical novel. I was reading *The Long Song* simultaneously with James Walvin's *Black Ivory*, and for some reason I felt that they were complementing each other, helping me in this way to construct a visual representation of the events described. When I finished reading, I found in Levy's acknowledgements a reference to Walvin. In addition, Levy argued in an interview that she gave at the Bath Literary Festival on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2011 that 'to the best of my knowledge I have represented historical events in my work'.

And the conversation between July and Miss Clara becomes fiercely antagonistic when July enquires about the prospect of joining the dances, but Miss Clara refuses on the basis of not being white enough:

*“Now, Miss July,” she said, “you know me dances be just for coloured women.”*

*“But me is a mulatto, Miss Clara,” July informed her. For a mulatto July had to be, at the very least. Her papa was a white man.*

*“You is just hoping to lift your colour, Miss July. You is not a mulatto. Be on your way,” Miss Clara told her.*

*“Me is a mulatto!” cried our July.*

*“Your papa be a white man?” Miss Clara scoffed. “You is too dark for your papa to be white.” For July’s skin had to be light. Honey to milk hues only, could Miss Clara approve. No bitter chocolate nor ebony skin ever stepped a country dance in her presence.*

*“Me tell you true, Miss Clara. Me papa be a white man”.*

*“No him was not.”*

*“Him was.”*

*“Him was not-him was some nigger.”*

*“Him was the overseer’pon Amity.”*

*“Him was not.”*

*“Him was a Scotch man.”*

*“A Scotch man! You no speak true.”*

(Levy, 2010a: 188)

Levy's constructed interactions are based upon systematic research of slave relationships and are illustrative of the psychological obstacles, dilemmas and conflicts that black women encountered within an unequal and dehumanising form of social organisation. What follows represents an attempt to further deconstruct the divisive influence of social stereotypes upon gender identifications and their implications for social relationships and community organisation.

### ***Stereotyped masculinities***

Identification with white hegemonic ideals shaped already racialised gender and sexual identities. Black men experienced low self-esteem because they were unable to fulfil the ideal of masculinity projected by white men (Beckles, 2004). Initially, slavery was an exclusively male enterprise where armies and slave traders with the power of guns and armoury imprisoned African men and transported them to the New World, for sale into slavery. In this context, black men felt disempowered and under violent and harsh conditions they embraced white ideals of masculinity because they seemed to be the 'winners' of an encounter with conflict. They were wealthy, powerful and capable of deciding the destiny of black people by labelling them and by using force and violence.

The fierce competition also waged around access to women. White men constructed black male sexuality as dangerous and risky for white women, and projected theories about the infantile, effeminate, cheerful, submissive, erratic and temperamental, selfish and deceitful, emotional and demonstrative disposition of black men. These qualities (stereotypes) explained within a dominant discourse the inability of black men to fulfil their roles as fathers capable of looking after their families. At the same time, white owners and overseers had sexual rights upon black women, which undermined relationships and the potential for family formation among slaves (Walvin, 2001). Patterson (1982: 167-168) portrays how

male slaves felt about sharing their partners, and argues that relationship patterns observed today can be linked and explained by these historical experiences:

*'Incapable of asserting his authority either as husband or father...the object of whatever affection he may possess, beaten, abused and often raped before his very eyes, and with his female partner often in closer link with the source of all power in the society, it is no wonder that the male slave eventually came to lose all pretensions to masculine pride and develop the irresponsible parental and sexual attitudes that are to be found even today.'*

Black men lived within a paternalistic system in which they were provided for by their masters for all their basic needs, including clothing, food and housing (Genovese, 1972; Patterson, 1982). Not being able to meet social expectations emasculated them and constructed them as inadequate according to culturally accepted ideals of masculinity. This impacted upon personal relationships with black women. One of the main features in slave societies was the prevalence and use of violence. Conflicts and differences resolved violently because physical force mediated power. Slave women were largely the victims of brutality and abuse because they were sexually exploited by white men, while they received the anger and frustration of their black partners (Jennings, 1990; Beckles, 1999, 2004).

Positive models of family and gender identities did exist among creole slaves and aimed to protect and promote survival within a community and kinship framework. The nuclear family was the preferred mode of family organisation but polygyny were widely practiced strategies of survival based upon male ability to provide and protect (Craton, 1997: 233-262). Ideal models of masculinity among black men were those that commanded respect and leadership, resisted oppression, protected and provided for others. Despite identification

with family and kinship models conducive to survival, Thornton Dill (1986) argues that there was a cultural assault upon the slave family and community organisation, which reinforced stereotypes and further created tensions in gender relationships and interactions.

As I will be explaining in more detail in the following section, slavery treated slaves as production units. Black men and women were valued independently, and for this reason, their productive rather than reproductive capacity was supported by the system of slavery. The latter meant that slave women participated in both the public and private spheres of life, engaging in both productive and reproductive labour<sup>8</sup>. Within prevailing gender ideologies black men were threatened by black women's relative independence, while the latter bore the burden of added responsibilities.

### ***Stereotyped femininities***

Women carried the burden of aggressive competition over the realisation of a modernist and hegemonic visions of masculinity. They were frequent victims of violent assault and rape from white and black men alike (Beckles, 2004). Occasionally, they received protection and material provisions from partners and lovers but largely they were on their own, working as hard as men in the plantation fields, bearing children and looking after them as well as they could. Their status as enslaved black women invited double disadvantage and jeopardised their welfare and wellbeing. Unlike white women, slave women participated in both productive and reproductive labour, and for this reason, they had a 'double day' consisting of work in the plantations, and at home (Thornton Dill, 1986). Their reproductive labour was intensified by the damage caused by disruptions to family organisation through sale, death and to a lesser extent choice (*Blassingame, sited in Thornton Dill, 1986*). Disruption was the

---

<sup>8</sup> Thornton Dill (1986) defines reproductive labour as all the work completed by women at home, including the preparation of food, clothing, emotional support and nurturing for all family members, bearing children and being responsible for their socialisation.

main cultural assault upon families that exacerbated their pain for being unable to raise their children (Thornton Dill, 1986).

For this reason, black women preferred not to mother children that they would not be able to look after and would have to eventually lose to slavery. According to the uterine law, children born to slave women inherited their mother's status (Walvin, 2001), which put pressure and responsibility upon women and undermined their partners' sense of agency (Patterson, 1982). Fertility rates in the Caribbean plantations were exceptionally low; lower than elsewhere in the world of Atlantic slavery because sugar monocultural production was considered demanding, and damaging to health (Mason, 1986). In this context, women practiced abortion widely and tried to use traditional wisdom techniques and prolonged breastfeeding as contraception methods (Bush-Slimani, 1993). In worst cases, they practiced infanticide under the conviction that it is preferable to bearing children in slavery (Walvin, 2001).

However, a marginal social status offered some opportunities for resistance in the form of reproductive labour that could not be controlled by masters. This gave rise to a culture that valued family and kin more than white authority (Thornton Dill, 1986). Family and kin established ties that provided meaning and resources to survive slavery. Socialisation within those frameworks reproduced communities and ensured their continuity despite adversity. In this way, family supported by the role of women in social reproduction offered a context where cultures that were necessarily political due to its marginal status and ability to survive servitude thrived.

Slave women despite marginalisation were relatively independent. This is because in their reproductive labour role they had the space and freedom to engage in resistance. Being close

to the natural lifecycles, and particularly the experience of birth and death – cycles that their participation in sugar crop cultivation reminded them of – they symbolised continuity and actively promoted social change. They had the wisdom to confront their fears and threats, express their views - often in the form of curses that invoke death (Brown, 2008) – behaved flexibly and protected their children. The mother-child bond was of primary importance to slave women (Thornton Dill, 1986), despite contradictory behaviours. It was because of their role as workers and carers that black people survived slavery, and created unique communities and cultures. Characteristically, women participated in household small-scale agricultural production that enhanced their independence and increased their self-sufficiency.

In post-emancipation Caribbean there is evidence to suggest that African-Caribbean women continued to participate in household-based agricultural production (Craton, 1997). They had the freedom to better support their families, but resources were limited and there was poverty and continuing social problems. In chapter 8 I describe their experiences in more detail. It will suffice here to mention that family organisation was nuclear with variations responsive to contextual circumstances. Being resilient and adaptive, African-Caribbean families developed accommodating strategies to cope with disruptions to community organisation. Their experiences and attitudes are important in understanding cultures of grief and responses to loss.

### **Emancipation and continuing social inequality**

The legacy of slavery is relevant to this day because social inequality and racism did not end with emancipation and the abolition of slavery in 1833 (the legislation took effect in 1834). Patterns of structural disadvantage continued as the white elite minority preserved their property rights and protected their competitive advantage in economic and political life. The



end of slavery would not have been achieved without the maturation of black people. By 1834 they had managed to create their own culture and communities, recognised themselves as a collective with shared values and interests, and mobilised to pursue greater equality. Slaves resisted oppression in direct and indirect ways throughout slavery (Palmie, 1996a&b), but towards the end they organised within Christian communities, and alongside legal efforts to end slavery staged in metropolitan Britain, they asserted their political position (Walvin, 2001).

According to Walvin (2001) the introduction of Christianity served the purpose of providing slaves with a language that enabled them to communicate to the world their humanity and claim it. Although Christian missionary instruction reinforced racist stereotypes, slaves appropriated the scriptures to communicate their experience. Particularly appealing was the notions of salvation in afterlife and God's suffering on earth that represented their life in slavery. In this framework they were also able to imagine a family of dead ancestors and maintain the African meanings that sustained their communities throughout slavery. The experience of death and its ritualization remained central in mobilising resistance and communicating political messages of emancipation and equality. Funerals were meeting places where political claims and strategies of resistance were negotiated (Walvin, 2001: 153-170).

The acquisition of formal freedom was undoubtedly significant but change happened slowly after emancipation. Although newly freed slaves had diversified their skills and towards the end of slavery had learned the monetary value of their work because they used to negotiate and sell their labour (Craon, 1997: 366), work opportunities became scarce. Plantocrats reorganised in order to serve their interests and the colonial government centralised its power and transferred it to Britain. Economies declined rapidly, sugar production reduced, and

there was land shortage – the outcome of absentee landlords (Craton, 1997: 400). For this reason, many former slaves claimed that they were better-off during slavery or that nothing changed after emancipation (Wright, 1976).

Emancipation and free labour was by the end of slavery calculated to be more profitable by economists, and this is the main driver behind the abolition of slavery (Craton, 1997: 421). The transition was slow and as Craton (1997: 375) defines it ‘evolutionary’ rather than ‘revolutionary’, driven by the need to preserve white hegemony in postcolonial societies. Racist stereotypes scientifically justified evolved alongside legal battles and lobbying to abolish slavery. Characteristically, Drescher (1992) argues that while Europe was negotiating the end of slavery, scientific racism was emerging. The simultaneity of the two processes indicates fear and scepticism towards the forthcoming changes and represents a conservative attempt to maintain hegemony and economic control.

Newly freed black men and women were socialised into a paternalistic system that had not given them the resources to lead life as free citizens (Genovese, 1974). Notions of dependency and attachment to masters did not help defy continuing racialisation and structural inequality. Many were distraught and unable to cope with the transition to freedom, act independently and respond to the new demands of everyday life in competitive markets with scarce opportunities and racist discriminatory structures of organisation.

Maturation was a gradual process with continuing notions of dependency being carried forward into the post-migration period in the UK. The latter constructs the history of slavery relevant and contributes to its continuing legacy. The topic is still being deconstructed, although slavery remains a social taboo especially among the older generation of African-Caribbean migrants that participated in this research. However, its consideration and

deconstruction is imperative to the contextual analysis of social problems and experiences, like the understanding of bereavement attempted in this thesis. Issues arising at the point of emancipation highlight the issues and processes that perpetuated social issues and experiences. The weight of the past in contexts of social disadvantage and continuing antagonisms did not radically transform the social order. Another representation by Andrea Levy in her novel *The Long Song* set in a Jamaican plantation right at the end of slavery is a good metaphor of the relevance of the past. Her protagonist *July* appears disoriented and out of place at a trial where she is being accused for occupying the plantations' Great House where she lived all her life.

*'This one (July)...declares that she has no other home than this. Says she had been living upon Amity for all her life. That it was the place of her birth, where her kindreds' bones were rested...She believes, as many of the negroes do in their child-like way, my lord, that there is no other world.*

(Levy, 2010a: 285)

Marris (1974) theorised that people grieving a loss need to hang on to something from the past if they are to adapt to the future, and ancestral graves provide such a link. This may explain the tendency of slaves to bury their relatives in their garden plots or under their houses (Brown, 2008). It also explains why the past has continuing influence over the present. Dehumanisation minimises resilience and allows the past to live in the present. Social problems persist and continuing historical memory is necessary in evaluating reality and promoting social change. However, where there is assault, memory is fragmented and it can take generations and the intervention of other histories and discourses for it to change.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of social organisation requires consideration of economic, political and socio-cultural relationships that make up social structures and define peoples' interactions in racialised contexts of servitude (Fenton, 1999). In this thesis, I adopt his approach but also combine multiple sources and historical material in order to enhance the ethnographic description that will inform the theorisation of bereavement. Social experiences are produced by patterns in social organisation, and initial analysis indicated that social inequalities, and particularly racial stereotypes and racism, implicate with responses to loss. In order to analyse these relationships in detail I had to go back to the history of slavery in order to explore its continuing legacy. The endeavour serves the aims of this thesis well, and links trans-historical relationships that the passage of time and diversifications attributed to loss and disruption have obscured.

Chapter 5 describes the immediate pre-migration colonial era during which racist ideologies appropriated culture and institutionalised inequality in order to perpetuate the exploitation of African-Caribbean people. The narrative supports our understanding of reproduced social patterns that shape responses to loss and bereavement experiences today. Migration to the United Kingdom in the 1950s was another experience that involved loss but also empowerment. It is within those histories that Foucault's (2001) definition of history is justified, and becomes analytically useful. In this context of interrupted linearity, I explain the reproduction of cultural traditions and social experiences; especially the experience of death and bereavement that in the Western world is considered disruptive rather than life-affirming. In this paradoxical way, we can better understand and appreciate the uniqueness of African-Caribbean cultures and attitudes towards death, dying, loss and bereavement.

## Chapter 5

### **Historical continuity and social change: The experience of African-Caribbean migrants in the United Kingdom, 1950-1970**

#### **Introduction**

The African-Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom was not a random movement of people. It evolved from relationships and bonds established between metropolitan Britain and its colonies through trade, transfer of capital and people (Hall, 1988). Mostly, it was the historical relationships of cultural exchange and the articulation of stereotypes that drew people of African-Caribbean heritage to metropolitan Britain. Slavery was a decisive factor behind the development of trans-Atlantic networks that served to distribute resources and power unequally and guarantee the hegemony of colonisers. The same principle of racialised subordination was reinforced in postcolonial societies. The latter confirms race as a social construct and as an instrument of hegemonic control in contexts of economic competition (Fenton, 1999). However, difference needs to be divisive if 'race' is to permeate social organisation (Saldanha, 2006). According to Eltis (1993) the power of difference lies in the human tendency to classify, differentiate and define the other. The latter in colonial and postcolonial competitive contexts led to renewed processes of stereotyping and racialization.

Historical patterns of disadvantage and processes of racial stereotyping have drawn the colonised to the metropolitan centres, and migration to the United Kingdom was the product of this relationship. Since slavery African-Caribbean people held unfavourable self-perceptions due to systematic comparison with a dominant white elite. Although, the justifications and narratives of racial stereotypes changed depending upon the culture, beliefs, circumstances and development of each historical period, the objective was the

creation of submissive subordination from alienated people who questioned themselves and their legitimacy to rights.

During the pre-migration period racist discourse centred upon an assumed cultural inferiority of black people. Cooperation was achieved through promise that they could access privileges commonly enjoyed by white people, if they adopted the superior ways and culture of metropolitan England. Reinforcement of this narrative within the education system and institutional structures led African-Caribbean people to believe that equality would indeed be achieved if they represented white society's cultural ideals. The poverty of the colonies and the prospect of migration to Britain when this became an option was seen as door to opportunity and social advancement, allowing entrance into white society's ways of life. This was the motivation of African-Caribbean migrants to the United Kingdom in the 1950s. They hoped for participation in British society on equal terms and to this day, people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain favour a policy of integration (Kalra and Kapoor, 2009; Phillips, 2009).

In this chapter, I analyse aspects of more recent history in the experience of people of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain. Looking at yet another historical era is important in the context of a thesis because it allows us to observe trans-historical patterns without adopting the role of the historian. Consideration of the pre-migration colonial legacy will also provide additional insight to the problem explored in this thesis because it indicates relationships that defined the experience of migrants, and the ways in which African-Caribbean heritage communities respond to loss. Their unwelcoming reception, harassment and social disadvantage caused grief and resurfaced traditional cultural narratives that negotiate the meaning of life and death. Despite discontinuity of experience and memory, persistent structures of inequality and social stereotypes revived aspects of African-

Caribbean culture that promote survival in crisis. The experience of migration involved loss the negotiation of which subsequently mobilised social change and development.

African-Caribbean identities are hybrid and dual. This means that they simultaneously maintain more than one reference points that they renegotiate when relationships severe or rearrange. This is why Foucault's understanding of history that takes discontinuities into consideration helps us to theorise African-Caribbean experiences in a historical perspective. In communities that evolved out of racialised slavery, loss was culturally defined and influenced much of the motivation to find empowerment and survive. In post-migration Britain similar notions revived because they served the community's survival under conditions of precarity. In this chapter, I will explore these meanings and consider their role in the development of hybrid identities. However, I will firstly analyse the strategies of colonialism and their impact upon African-Caribbean identities in order to appreciate the post-migration meaning of loss and understand processes of adaptation. In doing so, I will analyse narratives and first-person accounts found in written records and archives.

### **Discourse on cultural difference**

The pre-migration experience that African-Caribbean people of senior age report today is one of affiliation and nationalist loyalty to Britain. During my fieldwork every time I asked senior or middle-aged participants to talk to me about their experience, the narrative always started by recounting a pre-migration attachment to Britain, followed by rejection and disappointment when they arrived at the 'Motherland'. It is being constantly reiterated because this is the experience that defines their immediate history, identity and sense of belonging. Its meaning is not always deconstructed or clearly conceptualised into statements about their political, economic and cultural relationship to Britain. However, they feel that they must pass on to the younger generations this painful legacy in the form of narrative or

descriptive accounts. For this purpose, there are a number of published collections of first-person accounts on the topic (Francis, 1998; The Black Cultural Archives and Lambeth, 1998; Reynolds, 2001; BEMSCA, 2009); and one can find unedited material in the *Bristol Black Archives Partnership*<sup>9</sup>, Birmingham's *Black History Collection*<sup>10</sup>, the *Nottingham Black Archives*<sup>11</sup> or London's *Black Cultural Archives*<sup>12</sup>. Yet, some African-Caribbean people of senior age still hold on to and defend their belief in the bond and relationship to Britain, because it is equally an important aspect of their identity. Others claim this connection and their right to live with difference as part of it.

The feeling of loss and disappointment for an unwelcoming reception in Britain can be explained by investment in the narrative of belonging to the colonial centre. The method of incorporation of a colonial way of thinking relied upon processes of stereotyping that claimed the superiority of white imperial culture and compared unfavourably against it black colonial subjects. Fanon (2008) in *Black Skin, White Masks* deconstructs the methods and psychological process that reinforced white hegemony in colonial societies, and attributes inequality to processes of cultural stereotyping. Colonial cultures were unfavourably compared to a hegemonic European imperial culture, which was promoted through the education system, religion and popular narratives about the wealthy lifestyle and privileges of the white elite. Culturally accepted ideals instilled a sense of inferiority in the psyche of the impoverished and oppressed colonial subjects, and justified their subordination in terms of inherent cultural deficit. Cultural differences confirmed and exacerbated by material

---

<sup>9</sup> Information about the Bristol Black Archives Partnership can be accessed from <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/node/2917>

<sup>10</sup> Information about the Black History Collection can be accessed from <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Lib-Central-Archives-and-Heritage%2FPageLayout&cid=1223092756030&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper>

<sup>11</sup> Information about the Nottingham Black Archives can be accessed from <http://nottinghamblackarchive.wordpress.com/tag/nottingham-black-archive/>

<sup>12</sup> Information about London's Black Cultural Archives can be accessed from <http://www.bcaheritage.org.uk/>



disparities led them to negate their own cultures and natures and to seek ideals that did not represent them.

In this context, Africa-Caribbean people tried to imitate the manners and attitudes of the wealthy white elite. Although ‘mimicry’ (Bhabha, 1984) of imperial English language was equally an insult and a threat towards an essentialist hegemonic culture that lost its purity and integrity in the process of ‘translation’, its adoption undermined the confidence of the colonised who were seeking recognition, but what was demanded of them constantly changed. Their only alternative to an impoverished life in the colonies was subordination and willing adoption of an imperial vision of Britishness, which forced changes into the ways in which black people behaved and led to their alienation. In this way, inequality took a more subtle, less direct and purely psychological form, while historical relationships of inequality, social problems and structural disadvantage persisted. The impact of cultural stereotypes upon black people has been explained in psychoanalytic terms by Fanon:

*‘Guilt and inferiority are the usual consequences of this dialectic. The oppressed then tries to escape these, on the one hand by proclaiming his total and unconditional adoption of the new cultural models, and, on the other, by pronouncing an irreversible condemnation of his own cultural style.’*

(Fanon, 2006b: 25)

Identification with imperial ideals led to disappointment among migrants upon their rejection and unwelcoming reception in Britain. However, this was mediated by migrants’ first impression of a decadent post-war British society that hardly met the standards of its grandiose imperial image. For the first time in their lives, Caribbean migrants witnessed

white people working, white women with a broom, children begging for money, poverty and lack of education or polite manners (Phillips and Phillips 1998: 45-46).

Language became a site of contestation when the colonised visited the colonial centre. In the Caribbean the adoption of imperial English language acted as an indicator of status, value and worth. For this reason, mimicry of the colonial language was widely practiced. According to Fanon (2006a: 4) ‘...*the colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards*’, and language was one such clear indicator. Upon arrival in England, colonial language proved to serve pretensions that failed African-Caribbean migrants. Levy in her novel *Small Island* with sarcasm and wit recreates an exchange of words between Queenie (white British heroine) and Hortense (African-Caribbean heroine) who had just arrived in Britain.

*‘The door was answered by an Englishwoman. A blonde-haired, pink cheeked Englishwoman with eyes so blue they were the brightest thing on the street. She looked on my face, parted her slender lips and said, “Yes?”*

*“Is this the household of Mr Gilbert Joseph?”*

*“I beg your pardon?”*

*“Gilbert Joseph?” I said, a little slower.*

*“Oh, Gilbert. Who are you?” She pronounced Gilbert so strangely that for a moment I was anxious that I would be delivered to the wrong man.*

...

*“Didn’t he come to meet you?”*

*“I have not seen Gilbert” I told her, then went on to ask, “but this is perchance where he is aboding?”*

*At which the Englishwoman said, “What?”*”

African-Caribbean people invested in colonial ideology and culture because it was employed in the methods of instruction and socialisation within the colonial education system. Great Britain was presented as a wealthy Motherland of an Empire that span across the globe while colonial subjects were saved from Africa and their inferior nature:

*'I knew more about England than I did about Jamaica...I was taught in school that the black people in Jamaica were somehow better off than black people in South Africa, that although we were brought to Jamaica as slaves, this is somehow preferable to being free in whatever part of Africa we came from.'*

(Vince Reid in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 13)

In a more poetic manner, which is nevertheless based upon a real testimony, Vivienne Francis (1998: 78-79) describes how children were socialised into the colonial discourse through school story-telling. Their history was cruel and humiliating, while children's stories constructed black people as unintelligent. It was only logical then that they would try to avoid confronting their experience in order to escape association with negative stereotypes.

*'At school, teachers said that Jamaicans were originally African slaves who were brought to the Caribbean. "That can't be so" he thought... Africans were stupid, like the child in his Little Black Sambo book. The African boy was being chased by a tiger. He was chased round and round a tree and ended up being turned to butter. "Stupid boy", Len thought. His books about England romantically told of gallant, handsome princes rescuing beautiful princesses in distress. Len considered himself a prince, not a black Sambo.'*

The history of emancipation from slavery was manipulated to prove the benevolence of white people, and slavery itself was represented as salvation for black people from their inferior African cultural origins. All cultural symbols, visual representations and positions of authority promoted the desirability and centrality of white culture and ideals.

*'...I was also taught that the person who freed the slaves was a white man called Wilberforce, so that one was always encouraged to believe that one must be beholden to white people for whatever happened. Whatever you became, it was due to the benevolence and goodwill of white people...the whole imperialistic thing was drilled into you...The Governor was white, those in authority were white, the judges were white...And, of course, on top of that, you're bombarded with images of the newspapers, of white people, and in cinemas, again, white people. So you're encouraged to love them as it were. You're encouraged to cheer for the white goodie and boo the black baddie.'*

(Vince Reid in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 13-14)

The labour market hierarchy that reserved high status desirable jobs for white people reproduced traditional patterns of subordination and confirmed colonial perceptions about the inferiority of African-Caribbean people.

*'The governor was white, the head of the Jamaica government was white, the Financial Secretary and Treasurer was white. And you sort of grew up with, as long as these people did their three or four year tour of duty in Jamaica and they went back to England, another white man would come and take his post. So you just accepted the fact that these posts were just for white men.'*

(Connie Mark in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 17)

A method of raising one's social status in colonial societies was once again the progressive lightening of skin tone in processes of reproduction, because lighter skin meant that better opportunities could be accessed. As Fenton (1999) suggests, the classification of blackness into skin tone categories, as measurements of their value and worth, indicated the strength and hardness of the racial structures, rather than the opposite.

*'In Jamaica, you had this kind of caste, because at the very top of the tree, as it were, you had white people. And as you came down, down to the bottom, you had the progressive grades of colour, so you'd have the white people at the top and then you'd have the sort of fair skinned people, and then, right down the bottom, you had black people. The more light skinned you were, you got some kind of kudos for that. And opportunities going were given to you...The lighter skinned people did less menial work and, of course, white people did no menial work whatsoever. I never saw a white man work. In fact, I very often wondered how they lived, because they didn't seem to work.'*

(Vince Reid in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 16)

African-Caribbean migrants were surprised to find out that the same racial categories and sub-categories were not recognised by the metropolitan British. Those hoping for privileges due to their lighter skin tone were disappointed that they were seen as part of an undifferentiated black community. Andrea Levy's family lived in London in isolation from other black families in hope that they would be perceived as white due to their fair complexion. For this reason, Levy grew up with the impression that she is white to her

alienation (Levy and Morrison, 2009). This was resolved later in life, after her father's death, when she deconstructed her experience and identity in order to cope with loss.

African-Caribbean people worked hard to attain the objectives set for them and religion was an effective way in which they could demonstrate their cultural competency and gain recognition via ascription to shared values and mutual codes of ethical living. Religion in this context may have acted as a 'cleansing' ritual to a culture accused of primitiveness (Douglas, 2002). Although traditional meanings of empowerment communicated in Christian teachings that led to slavery's emancipation survived, religious practice was utilised by the oppressed in order to promote their incorporation into the larger society and change their ways and culture. Therefore, what liberated them during slavery and gave them a language to assert their humanity (Walvin, 2001), now largely served purposes of subordination.

This is the background and immediate historical experience of African-Caribbean migrants in Britain. The perceptions that they held about themselves were favourable only because they were British, and the colonies part of Britain. When their identifications stopped being recognised by the host society, they grieved. They had worked tirelessly to build a relationship, and invested all their efforts in the construction of a narrative imposed upon them. During the war effort they willingly served England by contributing to the war effort (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). For this reason, they arrived with the hope that in this superior country they would be treated equally and with respect. Hope is the main theme in Vivienne Francis's publication of first-person accounts titled *With Hope In Their Eyes*. All hope was immediately lost and rejection by Motherland was experienced as major trauma that caused grief.

## **The 'Windrush' narrative**

The truth about the colonial relationship to Britain was revealed when 493 African-Caribbean passengers arrived from Jamaica to Tilbury Essex on 22 June 1948, on the 'Empire Windrush'. They were the first black Caribbeans (or West Indians) to collectively migrate to Britain and they were received unwillingly, and with hostility. For this reason, the ship and its imagery is part of the migration narrative presented as loss and trauma.

The main motive behind making the decision to cross the Atlantic and migrate to Britain is that African-Caribbean people were British citizens, entitled to enter the United Kingdom, which they considered as Motherland. According to Phillips and Phillips (1998: 74) the British Nationality Act of 1948 'divided British citizenship into two categories: citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies, and citizenship of independent Commonwealth countries. Citizenship of the first category implied possession of the same rights throughout the Empire, and the act extended these to citizens in the second category'. Citizenship entitlement and emotional attachment were the main reasons that motivated African-Caribbean people to migrate, but they were accused that they had arrived to benefit financially and exhaust the country's resources. Migrants found these accusations offensive:

*'I didn't come here expecting to find pavements of gold or milk and honey.'*

(Sarah Thompson in The Black Cultural Archives, 1998: 30)

*'I don't like the ideology that people thought England was paved with gold...People did think England was the mother country. When I came here I didn't have a status as a Jamaican. I was British and going to the mother country was like going from one parish to another. You had no conception of being different.'*

Economic deprivation and poverty in the Caribbean - the 'push' factors of migration - were the consequences of colonial governance, which cultivated a culture of ideological and material dependency in order to maintain power, control and hegemony in social organisation. For this reason, African-Caribbean people have traditionally formed a pool of mobile cheap labour that would migrate wherever work was available (Hall, 1988). When the opportunity to visit the 'Motherland' emerged it was only logical that many people of young age would respond, especially because they felt a sense of allegiance and belonging to Britain. It is true that they did not expect England to be poor, because 'all their ideas about Britain had been acquired from a grandiose imperial imagery' (Phillips & Phillips, 1998: 125). In addition, they did expect to find better opportunities than the ones they could ever get in their birthplaces, which they blamed for their troubles and hardship. When I asked Mr Howarth, why he had decided to make the journey to the UK, his answer was that he was looking for an 'adventure'. It did not have to do with being unemployed.

Most of the people who made the journey to the UK were young, skilled and educated young men and women who had professional ambitions and dreams that could not be realised in the limited, agricultural economies of their homelands. Most of them were also employed because only people who worked could afford to purchase the expensive fare to England. Their decision to migrate to Britain can, therefore, be explained in terms of their emotional allegiance to Britain, the economic structure of the Caribbean islands as a pool of cheap labour for a global economy, and the ambition and aspirations of a generation of African-Caribbean people that wanted to change their lives and influence their future prospects. As Peach (*see Peach in Hall, 1998: 275-276*) argued the 'push' factors of migration allowed it to happen, but they did not cause it. According to Hall (1988: 277):



*'The long associations between Great Britain and the Caribbean "periphery" forged by the slave trade, four centuries of continuous contact, economic and political dependency, colonial occupation, common linguistic and cultural ties, etc., created what might be called the relations or "lines of force" along which the pull factors exerted their influence.'*

The rejection of African-Caribbean migrants from their Motherland was made explicit in purposeful acts of marginalisation and social exclusion in the housing sector, their subordination at work and positioning at the bottom of the stratification hierarchy, and in violent harassment and racist insults. As Phillips and Phillips (1998: 84) observe:

*'Work was no problem. They'd come to find work and there was plenty of work...Accommodation and getting on with people was going to be something altogether different.'*

However, even at work they were allocated undesirable jobs that white people would not do. Phillips and Phillips (1998: 124) explain the role of migrants in the economic system:

*'The positions they came to occupy in the labour market were closely related to demographic and social changes in Britain itself. The suburbanisation of the inner city population, along with the high take-up of skilled workers involved in the reversion to industrial processes, left substantial gaps in the bottom end of the market into which the migrants moved.'*

The overwhelming majority of migrants were young men, but the ratio between men and women evened out by the 1960s (Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 124), just before the door to migration closed in 1963. Both men and women found themselves in the position of having to do the most menial, undesirable, and sometimes hazardous and low paid jobs reinforcing the association between migration to Britain and slavery in the Caribbean.

*'We were given the most menial jobs and the lowest pay with no redress. It didn't matter what education or background you came from we were seen as slave labour to clean up a country that war had practically destroyed.'*

(May Cambridge in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 36)

*'When I finally got a job I had to work twelve to fourteen hours a day in horrendous condition for less than white workers.'*

(Lynette Findlater in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 15)

The same woman testified that her prolonged exposure to hard work is responsible for her partial disability at age 61. In addition to subordination at the workplace, certain occupations were not open to the newcomers from the colonies. In education, for example, African-Caribbean teachers qualified and certified by the Crown based on British curriculum were not allowed to practice their profession in British schools. They were told that they had to re-qualify. The latter is a major narrative in Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004), where the heroine Hortense, proud of her superior ways and educational qualification almost faints when she hears the news upon a job inquiry. This was also the actual experience of Levy's mother. Only in nursing, African-Caribbean women were allowed to work, but they were subjected to overt racism by their patients, and occupied junior posts that needed no formal training and qualifications:

*'The patients would ask you to lift your skirt and show them your tail or what was it like to live in trees, they would also want to know why you didn't wash or rub your skin and wonder why the dirt didn't come off.'*

(May Cambridge in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 36)

Material deprivation among Caribbean migrants was exacerbated by their opportunities in less rigid structures like the negotiation of their housing conditions and accommodation in the free property market. British landlords would not rent out to them from fear of disapproval from their own communities. When they did prices would be higher than usual, while their wages were lower. The accommodation that African-Caribbean migrants could get was decaying, dilapidated and overcrowded with inadequate facilities and unreasonable rules and conditions with which they had to comply.

The government had constructed them as 'unwanted' and employed a *lessaiz-faire* approach to deal with the 'problem' they represented. As a consequence, African-Caribbean migrants suffered hardship at home and in their private lives. Most got out of this debilitating situation as soon as possible and started renting from other African-Caribbean people who charged them even more but the conditions were better and they felt more comfortable within their own communities (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). When they were ready they would step into the property ladder by helping each other to raise money through the 'pardner system'. According to Phillips and Phillips (1998: 99):

*"'Pardner'" was a way of saving and amassing capital for immediate needs. A group of people would contribute a fixed sum of money each week which would be held by a banker. Each week one person would be entitled to a "hand". In a group of twenty*

*contributing £10 a week the hand would be £200. At the end of the round, the order would be reversed, so that the last and first hand went to the same person. This would be double the hand, yielding £400. This meant that members of the group could receive a relatively large sum of money at regular intervals for a small outlay.'*

However, even when work and housing was sorted, African-Caribbean migrants were still exposed to racist harassment and physical violence in their everyday interactions. The Teddy Boys would assault them, public opinion was hostile, and the police and the media were negatively predisposed towards them. Violent confrontations were life-threatening and further reinforced the isolation and social exclusion of migrants. In the late spring of 1959 Kelso Cochrane, a migrant from Antigua was killed by a group of Teddy Boys (Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 182). His funeral united the community in protest against social exclusion, raising the collective sentiment and mobilising organisation. Thereafter, more such incidents raised concern that there is a pattern of victimisation and neglect that undermine citizenship rights and reinforce social exclusion.

Stereotypes of black criminality provided an excuse for the police, media and government response to the problem of victimisation experienced by the black community in Britain. Phillips and Phillips (1998) argue that such activity was limited – the outcome of material deprivation and resentment about the loss experienced – but media representations reinforced generalisations. Material deprivation, hardship and structural subordination may have perpetuated endemic historical social problems and violence within the black community. However, Sam Selvon's literature offers another explanation to the problem. Young black men travelled to England with dreams and ambition but found that none was realistic. Vanity and hardship cultivated a culture of 'hustling', where one was trying to

survive by drawing upon the resources of his fellows. Within this context the route to crime was an option for those that dared to break the law in order to improve materially.

In his *Lonely Londoners* (2006) and *Moses Ascending* (2008), Selvon is critical of migrants who turned to crime and those who managed to make money legitimately because they were all driven by the desire to comply with stereotypical images of white privilege and prosperity that they had learned and identified with in the Caribbean. A sense of community and organisation existed during the post-migration years and reinforced survival, but African-Caribbean migrants were largely confused, alienated, depressed, isolated and struggled with issues of identity, belonging and survival in a hostile British society. For this reason, their relationships even within the boundaries of their own communities were often tense and competitive.

### **Rejection as loss and trauma**

The reception of African-Caribbean migrants and their racialisation within social organisation was experienced as a devastating loss that caused grief reactions. Perhaps they did not expect to find 'gold pavements' and knew that they would have to work hard, but they were not ready to be rejected by the country in which they thought that they belonged. They found themselves in the ambivalent and insecure situation in which officially they were British citizens and they were allowed into the country, but in everyday interactions and social structures there was lack of recognition of their citizenship status. They experienced loss in two respects: a) materially they experienced hardship worse than in the Caribbean where networks of support provided a fallback and made them feel included; b) politically and culturally their identity was being questioned and threatened and they were socially excluded and isolated.

According to Phillips and Phillips (1998: 99), what hurt African-Caribbean migrants most was that the wider British society did not acknowledge their historical relationship because it was ‘a sign of the process by which the Caribbeans would come to feel deprived stripped of the most vital part of their being’. British people did not even know who these migrants were, or where they came from. They could not locate the Caribbean on the map, and did not know that historically the Caribbean and Britain were linked by a colonial bond. Ignorance was experienced as insult and disenfranchisement by African-Caribbean migrants who lost meaning, because the narrative of their identity made no sense to the wider society. For this reason, they were called to reformulate meaning through a painful process that involved grief for the loss of an old self and colonial identity.

The experience of African-Caribbean migrants in England is best represented by the metaphor of death for two reasons. Firstly, because there was a decisive break between past and present life when identifications collapsed, bonds were terminated and relationships ended. And secondly, because migrants became marginalised, socially excluded and isolated in circumstances that Patterson (1982) with reference to slavery has described as ‘social death’.

In literature – fictional and autobiographical accounts - the magnitude of the loss has been represented by the discrepancy and sharp break between two narratives: one before, and one after migration. There are numerous first-person accounts and interviews in Phillips and Phillips (1998), Francis (1998), The Black Cultural Archives and Lambeth (1998), Reynolds (2001) and BEMSCA (2009) on the experience of migration. They all emphasise the same sentiment of disappointment, best exemplified in the contrast between an idealised lifestyle

among family, kin and community in the beautiful and fertile Caribbean land, and migrant life in hostile and unwelcoming industrial post-war Britain.

Mitchell in his autobiography (Bristol Records Office, 2010) catalogued in the Bristol City's Record Office testifies his emotional pain over the 'loss of a relationship' as he names the experience of severing bonds to Britain, and losing his colonial identification. He communicates the sudden loss experienced by migrants by spending considerable time describing festivals dedicated to the Queen and celebrations of a colonial relationship in the Caribbean, and contrasting it to the narrative of his hardship at work and housing, material deprivation and racist harassment in Britain. The same motif of 'broken promises' is repeated in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, where African-Caribbean people visualised their life in a British context they had become acquainted with within the context of an imperial discourse. The reality, however, was nothing like what migrants expected and one by one all the myths dissolved, to their disappointment. At that moment, their relationship to Britain as they knew it died, and they grieved its loss. This is what the technique of comparing past and present serves - to designate the finality of the experience, and the death of an identity and a colonial way of life.

Their rejection also signalled their withdrawal from social life, because within a racialised context their options of participation and inclusion were limited. As explained in the previous section, they found manual jobs with low wages and rent rooms in run-down but expensive houses, but what alienated them most was their social isolation. For this reason, many expressed the sentiment that Britain was worse than the Caribbean, where they felt part of a wider social network in which they belonged and enjoyed greater material comfort and variety. In contrast, in Britain they had to try and be invisible in an attempt to avoid attracting racist insults. Their economic, political and cultural marginalisation once again

placed them in a precarious and uncertain situation; they were there but they were unwanted without much option to change the circumstances they found themselves in. Their participation in social life was compromised and they became observers of the lives of 'others' from a place of structural disadvantage and subordination. This was a phase of liminality (Van Gennep, 2004) when they remained confused without an identity or direction. Their goals and objectives needed redefinition and there was urgent need to rewrite history.

The sentiment was expressed in funeral ritual performance that contrary to tradition lost its celebratory qualities and became 'dull, dark and quiet', as one of the informants for this research, Beatrice highlighted. Funerals represent liminality (Van Gennep, 2004), and identification in the process of funeral performance is a symbolic act of emotional expression. A depressed feeling shared by African-Caribbean migrants at funerals denotes fear and attempt to remain invisible and comply with the majority's attitudes, but also confusion and lack of direction from available identifications. It represented the sentiment of mourning and 'cultural loss' experienced by migrants (Eisenbruch, 1984a&b) that death compounds and represents. It was a time of complete loss, when everything was lost.

### **Re-identification with African-Caribbean history, ancestry and culture of grief**

Despite the shock that the contrasting narratives between past and present imply, the turn of the colonial relationship and the dismantling of bonds is not surprising when placed in the context of historical interactions between black and white people in the Western world. However, African-Caribbean narratives were not historically informed because the experience of slavery constituted a social taboo that attracted stigma to the identification (Goffman, 1990), and popular perceptions were shaped by a colonial discourse that sustained



their bond to the British, and with it, their subordination. For this reason, African-Caribbean people were alienated about their social status and were vulnerable to an emotive (nationalist) discourse imposed upon relationships and interactions that constructed them as outsiders and marginal. Migration alone is not an easy option because settlement into a new context requires flexibility and adaptation. According to Cohen (1997) this is what diasporas learn and in time embed into their identity because this is the only way in which they survive and become successful.

African-Caribbean migrants were misguided that they were simply going to the metropolis of the British Empire in which they belonged, and made a major leap into the unknown without being prepared for what they would encounter. Not only did they have to adapt to the new environment, but they also had to redefine their identity and historical narrative, curb their ambitions and change plans.

Migration encouraged re-identification with the historical experience of slavery, but it was not until the maturation of the second generation of British-born people of African-Caribbean heritage that such discourses were openly articulated, questioned and renegotiated. The generation of African-Caribbean migrants kept their heads down and worked hard to rebuild their lives (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Slavery remains a source of stigma, and inferiority issues emanating from colonial stereotypes still affect the now ageing community of African-Caribbean migrants, who raise eyebrows when slavery is mentioned in conversations. A male participant went as far as to argue that slaves in the Caribbean were not really slaves because they had their own plots where they could cultivate produce that they sold for money. Historical narratives, however, report that Caribbean slavery was harsh due to its sugar monocultural production that raised mortality levels and undermined fertility (Mason, 1986). They also still feel obliged to assert their value and worth, in an attempt to

defy colonial stereotypes that did not stop limiting their opportunities after migration. Senior male participants of this research who had participated in the war effort always communicate their experience, considering it as proof of their identification of a superior social status.

Nevertheless, African-Caribbean people of senior age openly talk about their disappointment upon arrival and their racialised subordination. Their efforts to resist centred upon the recreation of culture and community that would guarantee their survival, rather than the remembrance of slavery. This is because the issue of slavery was not politically correct in the contexts of their socialisation, but they were still familiar with the processes of reinforcing survival, traditionally used in their ancestral communities to defy marginality. Associations of community organisation with survival and protection constituted central themes that found expression in culture, and the practice and functions of funeralisation throughout history. The latter establishes death as familiar, even more so because such closeness is cumulatively cultivated by different types of loss throughout history that assert the need to start anew.

For this reason, African-Caribbean seniors even though they experience inner reservations, they are still the carriers of a legacy that understands life as ephemeral, accepts its finality and organise to promote better living conditions that sustain life and the continuation of their communities. Their response is as life-preserving as the revolutionary response of their children, if one takes into consideration the environment in which they were socialised.

Attitudes of identification with death are not conceptualised but they are embedded in culturally informed practice, and expressed in language constructing life as 'ephemeral' with 'acceptance' as a cultural response to loss. The revival of the celebratory funeral rituals reflected the mobilisation to recreate community as a strategy of adaptation to loss and

trauma. They restarted their traditions in community frameworks and revived African-Caribbean rituals of death and dying that represent continuity of life within an ethnic category that emphasise ancestral relationships. In this sense, the revival of death rituals reflects the re-invention of African-Caribbean communities, and death can be a metaphor that represents lived experience. Death can be as life-preserving as it is depriving. This argument has been raised by Brown (2008) in relation to slavery.

In chapter 6 I talk in detail about the African-Caribbean culture of grief and its relationship to bereavement. Throughout my analysis I also elaborate upon the self-preserving mode of community and family organisation that defines understandings and responses to loss in African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to remember that at this particular time in history, disenfranchised African-Caribbean migrants who experienced loss and rejection organised in traditional ways, learned in the contexts of slavery in order to survive marginalisation. In this way, they made the first step towards re-identification with the past and ancestry that gave rise to revived and reformulated notions of death and mortuary traditions. In the context of negotiations of experiences of loss they promote and mobilise for social change. The latter constructs African-Caribbean people familiar with processes of grief, which is crucially important in bereavement.

### **The development of British African-Caribbean identities**

The most challenging part in the long process of adaptation of African-Caribbean migrants, following their rejection by the country they considered as Motherland, was the transformation of the colonial discourse to include their new re-racialised position. Racial hierarchies were prominent in Caribbean colonial societies but the concept behind creating

social divisions and allocating privileges was culture, which led African-Caribbean people to believe that they had at least the opportunity to be upwardly mobile if they tried to comply with cultural expectations. For lighter skin tone complexions upward mobility was easier than the rest, but in Britain race fixed their subordination and sealed opportunities, placing them at a disadvantage.

The likelihood of reproduced long-term structural subordination in Britain encouraged resistance and stubborn identification with colonial narratives among migrants, because they could not think beyond the social stereotypes into which they were socialised, and lacked vision about what else they could be. Unwillingness to acknowledge slavery as part of their historical legacy among senior African-Caribbean citizens in Britain is, therefore, best interpreted not as 'denial', but as inability and fear to come to terms with poverty, structural disadvantage and racism. The same argument has been raised by Kellehear (1984) in relation to death. He argues that death denial is better explained in terms of the difficulty to confront a reality that people may not be able to change given the resources or knowledge and education that they have about the experience. It is a social problem, rather than a psychological one.

My research participant Mr Thompson does not even admit to the experience of racism in England. He argues that racism is 'irrelevant', and that 'it is what you make of it that matters'. He claims that all his relationships have always been positive because he did not respond to racist remarks. He was sociable and likable and had many white friends. However, as I will explain in chapter 7, racism was part of his experience in the Royal Air Force (RAF) but he tended to turn a blind eye and cooperate. His relationships may have been positive because he was cooperative, but his approach created tensions and problems for his family. His marriage ended in divorce, he grieved for his wife and their failed

relationship only after her death, which compounded his bereavement process, and in old age he struggled without the safety and care that family provides. Mr Thompson's example indicates that interactions that stem from colonial identifications and stereotypes can impact upon bereavement processes and wellbeing in old age. Mr Thompson's experience is unique in that it highlights the power of social structure, patterns and historical relationships. He may have tried hard enough to legitimately enter white society, but the hardness of racialised boundaries prevented him. His persistence undermined his personal relationships, integrity and wellbeing.

The author Andrea Levy (Levy and Morrison, 2009) has also reported that her family turned a blind eye to their racialised experience in post-migration Britain. They never discussed about the Caribbean, race, colour or difference and disadvantage. Levy grew up being oblivious to the social issues that affected her and stereotypes that defined her. Her parents, being fair skin and relatively privileged African-Caribbean migrants, could not afford to lose their status. In England they held on to the ideal even when the outside world changed, and their meanings lost all practical application.

*'There was always a thing in my family where you had to try to deny that you were black-if we sort of kept our heads down, no one would notice we'd sneaked into this country-that was definitely the thing. And because I'm not very dark my parents hoped that nobody would notice.'*

(Levy and Morrison, 2009: 327)

They continued identifying with a middle-class status that they were used to in the Caribbean where they worked in skilled jobs. However, in England they had to rely upon different values to sustain their identification:

*'I thought we were middle class because we had three meals a day.'*

(Levy, 2010b)

Levy explored the social issues that affect her community in Britain after her father's death, when she was forced to reflect upon his life, their relationship, poverty and discrimination that shaped his dying experience within the healthcare system. This is when she realised that race had been important throughout her life. She gradually deconstructed the relationships involved in her writing, in which she addressed a number of issues in historical perspective, from migration to identity and genealogy, and more recently slavery.

Bereavement and confrontation with racism and racialization was a transformative experience for Levy that led to her maturation, independence and fulfilment. Being British born second generation citizen of African-Caribbean heritage, Levy was at the same time influenced by popular trends to re-discover the historical legacy of slavery, and reflect upon the ways in which it affects present experience. Lack of familiarity with history and social reservations to address it did not serve the needs of African-Caribbean people – especially young people of African-Caribbean heritage - because they were exposed to demanding social circumstances with no contextual information or experience. At the same time, they felt entitled to rights in Britain. Becoming acquainted with history and redefining relationships and identities allowed them to reposition themselves effectively in social structure and promote better race relations. However, the experience was reactionary because it involved large cultural changes and accommodations both within African-Caribbean heritage communities and the larger British society, and promoted rapid social change.

The race deflecting attitude of African-Caribbean migrants was succeeded by the more assertive introduction of a hybrid identity embraced by a disenfranchised generation of British-born African-Caribbean heritage youth. While their migrant parents were unwilling to identify with their racialised status, British-born children familiar with the ways of the society they lived in, asserted their claims to belonging and experience of marginalisation. African-Caribbean migrants were believed to have accepted their status and role in Britain and were, therefore, suitable for subordination, while their children, humanised by their British socialisation, were defiant and unruly (Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 256). Essentially, however, it was the transition of migration that was responsible for relationships that seemed in conflict but were nonetheless complementary. Migration involved rapid social change, where different generations of African-Caribbean people held diverse social knowledge and were required to communicate their meanings and experiences in order to reach understanding. In the process, tensions and friction reproduced historical patterns in social organisation, social problems and inequality. However, this was important to cultural and community reproduction and their contextual adaptation that serves the needs of life in Britain.

The closeness, affinity and care that the second generation now demonstrates towards the first generation of African-Caribbean migrants is explained by the development of an understanding of the reasons their parents were behaving with acceptance, as they read history and learned about slavery and colonial stereotypes. Their parents, on the other hand, made every effort to record raw experience without conceptualisation, aiding communication in this way. In this respect, patterns of loss in personal relationships led to collective progress, maturation and development, and enhanced African-Caribbean incorporation into the wider British society. Indicative of these interactions and their outcomes is the caring relationships that the two generations now share. Seniors are being

protected in old age and community structures are being reproduced, knowing that the migrant generation experienced considerable hardship in their lives but made every effort to survive and secure a better life for their children. They consider it their responsibility to preserve this cultural and social capital, which is invaluable in times of crisis in racialised contexts.

The second generation of African-Caribbean youth engaged in resistance against structural subordination and racism by developing hybrid identifications (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996; Bhabha, 1990). They were influenced by the civil rights movements in the United States that mobilised against colonialism and aimed for the liberation and independence of black people around the world, as well as, greater equality in the developed metropolitan centres of the Western world. In this way, African-Caribbean youth in Britain developed a more universalising and humanitarian identity that constructed them as world citizens (Gilroy, 2007). Their ideas made calls for a symbolic return to Motherland Africa and promoted Africentric values and culture, but there was variety and diversity in the origins of identification drawing resource from multiple experiences, historical times and locations.

A leading inspirational figure for African-Caribbean youth in the seventies that expressed their views on society and politics was the Jamaican reggae musician Bob Marley. Paul Gilroy reports to Phillips and Phillips (1998: 296-297):

*'And my honest opinion is that that generation would have committed a kind of collective social suicide without the birth of that kind of black British identity in the seventies, because they are harassed from pillar to post...And it is astonishing to me that anything was rescued from it, and if you want a single figure who rescued something from it, it is Bob Marley... You know, Marley sings out of that trouble, out*



*of tribulation, out of exile, out of being marginalised. And he makes the symbolic connection between Kingston and Handsworth. Black people feel the same. They do not know what Kingston is like, but they know that Handsworth is like Kingston, both of them are being surveyed by helicopters and entered by police car, et cetera. It's the same. You are in Babylon.'*

Identification with Bob Marley encouraged everyone irrespective of their parents' origin in the Caribbean to be Jamaican, and behave like one. The combination of diverse elements featured prominently in popular identifications of black identity, but the adoption of 'one' Jamaican identity inspired by Bob Marley allowed black youth in Britain to promote a collective cultural revolution, gain confidence and assert their belonging in Britain.

*'It's the younger generation that take the frontline in the seventies, and they are a deeply troubled generation, because they don't know who they are. They're not British, 'cos the British don't want them; they're not Caribbean, because they've never seen the Caribbean, nothing to do with it. They called themselves African for a long time, but, of course, they'd never been to Africa, either. They are saved spiritually and culturally, by the advent of Rastafarianism and by Reggae. These two forces make it possible for them to construct a new form of symbolic identification for themselves. Don't ask me what it's conjured out of, you know. It's conjured out of the back end of the Bible, the Bible read upside down, myth about Haile Selassie. It's conjured out of the boogie box that plays Roots Reggae music. It's conjured out of stories coming out of Kingston, you know, the Gun Court, and Trenchtown. It's conjured out of scraps, really, bits and pieces, but they manufacture for themselves a black identity that they feel proud of. They find a space for themselves.'*

(Paul Gilroy cited in Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 296)

The experience of African-Caribbean heritage second generation British citizens has been conceptualised by cultural studies theorists as manifestation of cultural hybridity (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996; Bhabha, 1990) that features prominently among black people in the West since slavery (Craton, 1997; Walvin, 2001; Klein, 2010). A traditional life-preserving mode of social identification was re-employed to research African roots, and create new maps of belonging. Hybrid identities are embedded within particular contexts but also draw links in distant locations in diasporic networks. Their formation announces the creation of ‘new ethnicities’ with empowering potential that lies within their anti-essentialist construction.

Cultural hybridity was utilised by African-Caribbean people in Britain as a coping strategy to loss, social exclusion and racism because it allowed them to redefine their identity and defend it in ways that reinforced their legitimacy in Britain, while they maintained their African and Caribbean references. It gave them the opportunity to claim their existence without identification with stable, essentialist and ‘pure’ categories, historically denied to them. In this way, they found a way to exist amidst homogeneity, while they advocated a multicultural but autonomous framework, which still managed to be credited as a unique and independent category. In this respect, hybridity is provocatively powerful and socially transformative. In addition, it equips people with resilience because its basic principle relies upon the need to adapt and change in order to cope with threats to life and existential security.

The option to re-identify with the history of slavery - which had largely been overlooked by past generations of African-Caribbean people – in the context of cultural hybridisation, opened new opportunities for youth in the 70s and early 80s. It meant that they could incorporate their cultural traditions and perspectives into their interpretative framework. These proved practically helpful in overcoming obstacles and stereotypes that prevented

upward mobility. The experience of slavery carries with it notions of loss and ritualises methods of overcoming the experience. Such cultural capital would have remained underutilised had the younger generation not experimented with cultural hybridity and re-negotiated stigmatised aspects of their history. However, their cooperation with the first generation of African-Caribbean migrants was imperative to the re-discovery of those traditions, practices and attitudes encapsulated in death rituals and understandings.

## **Conclusion**

The history of African-Caribbean people seems fragmented as a result of their investment in promoting their social incorporation into Western societies that always led to their social exclusion and racialisation. For this reason, they repeatedly experienced the loss and grief of separation from the political positions and identifications they historically invested in. The continuity of African-Caribbean heritage experience, therefore, lies in the sociological patterns that connect past and present. Economic disadvantage, political subordination and processes of cultural stereotyping reproduce social experience in a transhistorical perspective. The latter allows us to study African-Caribbean heritage experience interrupted by mortality, loss and trauma systematically, and analyse its uniqueness and peculiarity. Reference to a different and more recent historical era demonstrates continuing patterns in social organisation amidst confusion and fragmentation, while it describes the immediate historical experience of the participants of this research.

The historical experience of migration to the United Kingdom encouraged the evaluation of carefully concealed competitive relationships, previously obscured by colonial rule and the methods of its application. Loss and grief followed the collapse of identifications, but the end of alienation brought cultural revival and a real opportunity to assert belonging and claim

rights and citizenship in Britain. Awareness of the meaning and role of loss in life was incorporated into the construction of identifications that draw links to the African-Caribbean legacy of slavery, saturate perceptions and influence responses to grief. The latter gave rise to a culture of grief that informs experience and organisation in African-Caribbean communities. It finds expression in African-Caribbean attitudes towards death, dying and bereavement and funerary rituals, and relies upon the basic principle that life is ephemeral. Life organised upon such awareness is resilient to hardship and mobilises adaptive processes that promote social change.

## **Chapter 6**

### **African-Caribbean culture of grief**

#### **Introduction**

A community that draws its perspective on life from a culture of grief is a community that articulates notions about the ephemerality of life, accepts death as inevitable, advocates ideas about the meaningfulness of loss - usually accompanied by religious beliefs in the afterlife and ritualistic practices that draw spiritual links to the dead – and demonstrates empowerment and resilience as a response to loss. This is the profile of a community that historically constructed its identity in the context of traumatic experiences. The descriptions presented in this chapter draw upon observations in African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain.

A culture of grief derives from identification with historical experiences of loss, adversity and suffering within the immediate and ancestral memory of the community. In British African-Caribbean heritage communities, a cultural understanding of grief developed within negotiations of their post-migration memories of rejection, social exclusion, suffering and racism. This is the experience that inflected the community's relationship to its historical and ancestral past, including its relationship to colonialism and slavery by constructing it as relevant in interpreting the present. Common trans-historical racialised processes of establishing inequality in social organisation promote awareness of historical continuity, and in this way, create ethnic identity and reproduce traditional cultural attitudes and practices particular to African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain. Due to the close

relationship of mortality to hardship and dehumanisation in African-Caribbean historical experiences, identifications on the basis of historical continuities draw upon cultural and ancestral understandings of loss and ritualised responses to the experience.

In this chapter, I describe African-Caribbean heritage cultural attitudes towards death and loss. Community among African-Caribbean heritage people in Britain was born out of what Noys (2005) calls 'bare life', which means that life alone is honoured and appreciated even if people are deprived of rights, and their full participation in society is undermined. Frankl (2004) argued that this type of life relies upon the appreciation of alternative qualities like love, art, spirituality and soulful life that sustain the motivation to live under dehumanising circumstances. African-Caribbean cultures demonstrate such qualities. In this chapter, I will examine these meanings and their role in the construction of attitudes towards death, dying and bereavement. In this way, I will explain how death constructs community, identity and life in African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain. In chapters 7 and 8, I will analyse how relationship patterns that emanate from historical structural inequalities compound bereavement experiences. However, cultural processes of interpreting loss and promoting survival mobilise social change and inflect the negotiation of unequal social relationships during bereavement.

The location of this chapter in the middle of the thesis is intentional. It describes the culture that expresses African-Caribbean understandings and meanings and shapes action. This culture is socially constructed in historical processes of negotiation of the meaning of loss. Its lack of stable references as a result of dispossession and death, makes it consciously and intentionally hybrid. With cultural hybridity as a political micro-level response to racism and social disadvantage, we are able to explore the complexity of identities involved in racialised experiences, and de-essentialise race, which was central in the analysis of social

organisation. The adopted approach to theorising cultural hybridity, however, necessarily links identity to historical experiences and contextual conditions. It also serves to locate experiences and describe a certain culture. For advocates of the erasure of race in the context of reflexive modernity, this approach would not suffice. For the purposes of this thesis and for the theoretical principles adopted, however, it does.

Cultural hybridity highlights the essentially contingent and ambivalent nature of identities, which are products of racialised social structures. The way in which I theorised cultural hybridity in this thesis also indicates the process in which these identities were constructed in interactions with loss. In this way, I position hybridity within a historical and social framework, while I deconstruct its relationship to experiences of loss. Although this may seem to reify a concept that has the potential to de-essentialise race, it is congruent with social constructionist approaches to understanding the experience. With reference to the topic under consideration, a social constructionist approach serves to identify the obstacles in our thinking and difficulties in relating with difference that prevent the realisation of equality and social cohesion. In other words, by studying the impact of racialised experiences and historical dispossession upon contemporary bereavement experiences, I was able to identify areas of disenfranchisement that need to be addressed and communicated within wider community policy frameworks of inclusion. Disenfranchisement in this case is the outcome of historical tensions and racial stereotypes that organise social structures despite hybridity and efforts to transgress social constraints and boundaries.

The understanding of racialised relationships and their impact upon social life and identity within a social constructionist framework can be strongly linked to intellectual political activism (Robinson, 1983; Omi and Winant 1994; Dennis, 1997), because it promotes the evolution of ideas and attitudes towards race. Social constructionism employed as political

activism can have transformative effects upon the opportunities and wellbeing of people who are at the receiving end of social disadvantage, and who are being marginalised on the basis of ‘difference’. St Louis (2010) legitimizes such a theorisation of race, and acknowledges that hybridity has a role within the intellectual project that combines the specificity of individuated identities with the political task of mapping the social world and its web of human relations. Hybridity in this context signifies the maturation of racialised struggles for social justice and inclusion, and indicates that identities are no longer limited to the illusory conditions of race, but are increasingly intertwined with an informal political realm.

St Louis (2010) further argues that within Locke’s (1992) social constructionist perspective on the study of race, effort is concentrated upon the social and historical conditions that shape the experience, not for the purpose of producing theories – but - in order to promote oppositional political practice. Such a perspective fulfils the criteria of postmodernist critique that advocates non-negative, non-reductive and anti-foundationalist employment of identities. Race may act as stimulus for civilizational development, but it is not the prime stimulation for civilization. In this context, if it is linked to ethically responsible ends that stress social syncretism instead of pre-social organicism, it can have transformative impact. In this respect, race is purposive and it can be used to serve social development:

*‘Freed from the teleological tyranny of primordialist biological and social sciences, membership of a given racial group positioned within social relations of dominance does not signify a racial identity irrevocably characterised by inferiority and subjugation as a point of existential closure. Instead, conceived within an activist-intellectual schema that constitutes race as socially purposive symbolic matter, the future of “racial groups” is not assigned along with their badge of race, but is open*



*to the various developmental possibilities derived from a social path that can be altered through political intervention'*

(St Louis, 2010: 667-668)

In the introduction to this thesis I explained that the theorisation of race relations is not the primary objective. It only serves to explain bereavement experiences among African-Caribbean heritage people and communities in Britain. The opportunity offered by this research to propose ways in which greater wellbeing can be promoted if issues that preoccupy African-Caribbean heritage bereaved people are taken into consideration by the larger society and public health services, locates it within the type of social constructionist studies that serve intellectual-activist purposes. I did not intend to essentialise race, but to define it in order to explain loss and social inequalities. Afterwards, I further complicated categories with the analysis of hybridity and syncretic identities. Racial categories are the outcome of loss and social disadvantage, but in this thesis their legitimacy is being questioned both by African-Caribbean heritage peoples' identifications, and by the future policy directions and social change proposed in the conclusion. The following description of cultural attitudes must be seen within this hybrid framework of anti-discriminatory politics and agency/action.

### **'Grief is grief'**

Numerous times throughout my fieldwork at the organisation for ethnic minority senior citizens, I heard members saying 'grief is grief' with not much more to add in order to describe the experience. This was their reply during observations when I had to explain to them what my research is about, or when they wanted to refuse participation in interviews. Women were more likely than men to respond in this way, and refuse participation. Men

identified with the same sentiment, and having acknowledged that ‘grief is grief’ they diverted the conversation towards the recounting of their experience of post-migration racialisation in Britain. Their strategic responses suggest that they are cautious in expressing their emotions and grief openly in a society that has historically racialised and excluded them. However, men adopt the role of community’s spokespersons, responsible for communicating their experience to the outside world. Their tendency to talk more readily about racism when asked about bereavement is also indicative of the relationship between the two experiences. Racism and marginalisation compound bereavement experiences of African-Caribbean migrants, at the same time as they construct a perspective upon life that promotes acceptance and resilience. Race and racism have been central in this historical experience and saturate all areas of social life, including bereavement. An interview or a conversation that invites participants to talk about an experience that involves suffering reminds them of experiences of racialization. This may be a matter of similarity and resemblance between the two experiences, because as bereavement accounts presented in this thesis highlight some deaths were shaped by circumstances in which race played a role, either directly as overt racism/violence or indirectly in racialised encounters and interactions. The latter will be further explained in the next two chapters.

The sentiment that ‘grief is grief’ also means that despite unique understandings of grief communicated within African-Caribbean heritage communities, they equally identify with Western constructs of grief that acknowledge the psychological nature of the experience. Grief is simply a painful emotion that we experience when we lose a loved one to death. People of African-Caribbean heritage when they proclaim that ‘grief is grief’ also give the impression of an expert who, by being closely familiar to the experience, has developed an attitude of acceptance towards loss. With this in mind, the current research has revealed that participants proceed to implement the necessary social and psychological changes in order

to adjust to the transition. Their experiences of bereavement, whether they involve intense grief as described by psychologists or not, are compounded by racialization and structural inequalities, but consistent victimisation creates a culture that accepts loss, and on this basis, survives and develops adaptive strategies. The recognition of grief as an emotional experience does not necessarily mean that African-Caribbean heritage bereaved people identify with the expectation that their grief will come to an end. Perhaps they expect the pain of grief to end but their love for the deceased to remain timeless and eternal as Walter (1999). And they express this sentiment in identifications with ancestry and ongoing communications with the deceased.

On the basis of my participants' reaction to my research topic I draw a distinction between the emotional experience of grief and the process of adaptation to loss, which I call bereavement. By encountering people who recognise, name and accept the pain of grief, but survive under considerable hardship by being proactive and organised, led me to the conclusion that grief and bereavement are two separate processes. Grief or the emotional pain of loss may be relatively short-lived, but the process of adaptation to loss may be ongoing while the bereaved readjust socially and make the necessary changes needed to cope with loss and the disruption that it creates in the social lives of the bereaved. In racialised lives bereavement processes are distinct and pronounced, and for this reason, they may be easier to discern and describe (although their sociological analysis may be more complex). For this reason, minority communities provide unique opportunities for the sociological study of bereavement that help us identify its processes and enable us to elaborate and transfer our observations in other contexts.

Bereavement has been theorised as the objective state of having lost someone or something (Walter, 1999). However, I consider this as a static conceptualisation of a dynamic process

of social reorganisation that runs the risk of psychologising the experience and provides limited material for reflection and exercise of our sociological imagination. Bereavement includes grief that stimulates a number of social processes in the lives of the bereaved which are context specific. In this thesis, I deconstruct the sociological and cultural processes involved in the process of adaptation to loss that determine the direction and outcome of bereavement experiences among African-Caribbean people in Britain. Grief is part of this process because irrespective of the nature of the relationship to the deceased it mobilises social reorganisation. Within this framework of understanding bereavement, existing theories such as the continuing bonds theory (Walter, 1996; Valentine, 2007) can be explicated, defended and applied to particular cases with greater analytical effectiveness, because they will illustrate the complexity of social relationships that define the experience in the process of transition within society and its structures.

The above distinction also serves to explain the controversy between psychological and sociological theories of grief presented in chapter 1 and highlight their individual unique contributions to the subject. Psychologists concentrate upon those grief experiences caused by loss and separation, and within a modernist and therapeutic approach they are interested in promoting wellbeing for the benefit of modern societies and progress (Small, 2001). Sociologists on the other hand, are concerned with a greater variety of grief experiences and examine how social relationships and organisation implicate with the process of adaptation to loss that takes place outside the psychotherapeutic encounter. For this reason, objective psychological processes that emphasise the importance of letting-go and moving-on (Freud, 1957 [1917]; Bowlby, 1971a, 1971b, 1979, 1981; Parkes, 1972; Raphael, 1984; Worden, 1991 [1982]) as well as stage theories of grief (Averill, 1968, Bowlby, 1971a, 1971b, 1981; Parkes, 1972; Worden, 1991 [1982]; Raphael, 1984; Rando, 1993) have been criticised by sociologists who understand that it is not so easy for people to overcome their pain without

repositioning within social organisation (Walter, 1999; Kellehear, 2002; Howarth, 2007). Continuing bonds are necessary in this context because they facilitate appropriate for the circumstances of the bereaved social reorganisation. They also communicate a disenfranchised experience in contexts of social disadvantage and promote empowerment.

### ***Grief – psychological experience***

People who have experienced considerable loss in their lives understand that grief is an emotional trauma that will and needs to be overcome. Therefore, participants in this research expressed that grief is a very uncomfortable, painful and disorienting experience from which they will eventually move on, because it is not life-sustaining or preserving. It is isolating, depressing and embarrassing, and locks the bereaved in a liminal state unable to participate in social life and activity among other people. It is extremely difficult to change the feeling of loss and deprivation, which leaves its marks upon the bereaved.

*'it's one of them pain that you cannot share that kind of pain with anybody...It's like when you have got a shoe that is hurting your feet and you can't find the money to get yourself a new pair of shoes, a bigger size. You've got to keep wearing those shoes until you've got a little corn on your toe. Have you ever been through that when you had a little corn on your toe because your shoe is too tight? You try to walk stylish because you don't want anybody to see you are hurting but, you know...it's the same with losses.'*

(Mrs Grace)

The understanding of grief as unnecessary and transitory, but also as stigmatising, equally reflects modernist Western understandings and illustrates that African-Caribbean heritage

individuals identify with British concepts, beliefs and ideas. In addition, women especially demonstrated a basic amateur understanding of grief's psychology. Mrs Grace, for example, went as far as to articulate the psychological notions of letting-go, existential security shattered by loss and attachment to the deceased in her narrative of her husband's loss. However, being dedicated Christian she interpreted attachment in terms of religious principles, rather than in purely intellectual terms, mixing-up the perspectives that she advocates in order to serve her emotional needs.

*'Well, when, well, every loss, especially if it is your loved one, it tends to shatter your world in it. Especially if it is your husband, husband, mother, well friends or whatever, but...yeah, you know it really shatters, and it is the letting-go which is the most difficult part; the letting-go. Cause when you (sighs and then pauses) think of how many years you have been in sickness and in health, that was the vow, until death will part us apart.'*

(Mrs Grace)

There is a gendered cultural script with women being more likely than men to identify with grief in this way. Female emotional complexity - the outcome of inner reflexive processes cultivated in adverse reproductive labour experiences (Thornton Dill, 1986) - may well play a role in developing an understanding of psychological functions. Women who intellectualised grief experiences in psychological terms were married with children, and had spent considerable time of their lives working and managing their households simultaneously. Being limited by options that would enable them to change their lives structurally they resorted to the understanding of inner processes that psychology and psychotherapy provide. The latter enabled them to implement minor changes within social

confines and racialised boundaries with greater impact upon their relationships and immediate social circles.

Characteristically, Mrs Grace and Cynthia who fit this description resorted to understanding grief in counselling. They were already carers at home and working women who participated in contexts in which their roles were stable and set. However, they needed a personal journey that would enable them to better understand their inner lives in order to adapt to loss and change their social lives. Perhaps this is why psychological research on grief mainly relies upon samples consisted of women, and particularly widows (one such classic example in the study by Colin Murray Parkes *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*). Within their reproductive labour responsibilities they cannot complete their bereavement processes, when the latter is defined as an experience that leads to social reorganisation. The same observation could potentially be valid in relation to other groups of people, who because of poverty or another source of disadvantage are limited in their options and choices that involve social change and transformation. The verbalisation of emotional experiences provides the means in which they may perform limited adaptations.

Younger African-Caribbean heritage women demonstrate greater diversity in their responses to loss because they have choice exercised in search for prospects and career opportunities. Continuing bonds are part and parcel of these ongoing processes that console grief. Such an approach reflects lack of social regulation (Walter, 1999), and resists modernist influences. As I will demonstrate in this thesis, women are largely driven by the responsibility to support and preserve their families and communities in a context of disadvantage through socialisation processes. For this reason, women overcome relationship patterns that negatively impact upon their lives, which can be seen as the outcome of structural disadvantage and social inequality perpetuated in historical perspective. And within careers

in social work or other care roles, they find opportunities to combine modern professionalism with traditional roles and expectations. In this way, they construct a unique culture of female formal and informal care-givers. Nearly all the female participants of this research had counselling skills and/or worked in social care. Social work or work within the African-Caribbean heritage community was a preferable option when they wanted to make structural changes to their lives in the face of loss, bereavement and personal crisis. They were able to enhance their independence and overcome the limitations of social inequalities while they did not divert away from their traditional roles and identities, committed to the preservation and protection of their communities in trans-historical perspective.

Mrs Grace, a mother of 6, lost her husband unexpectedly and relatively prematurely at the age of 67. She confessed that she was shattered by grief, and for over a year she felt helpless. She managed to survive by diverting her nurturing roles to the community. She briefly attended a counselling course after her husband's death but felt that she did not need it because she had the necessary knowledge and skills to take-up the mentor's role within her Christian community. She teaches young children the ethics and ways of her community through religious instruction, and assists the Golden Ages (people over 80 years old) with daily care and routines.

Cynthia, a mother of 4, qualified in counselling and works part-time for an organisation that provides services for the National Health Service (NHS). Influenced by her professional knowledge, she decided to take 6 months off work following the death of her uncle and aunt who died within two months in order to do the necessary grief work (Stroebe, 1993). She has had multiple separation experiences including her migration to the UK when she joined her parents at the age of 9 after having lived with her grandmother in Jamaica for 8 years. The problematic relationship with her mother that lacked understanding for Cynthia, and the



equally disorienting relationship with her husband added to her sense of loss. When her loving parents (uncle and aunt) died she felt that it was time to deal with all the issues that had been distracting her throughout her life in order to start anew under different circumstances, terms and conditions. The pain of grief disturbed her comfort zone and what she hesitated to change from fear of going through the pain of transition was now unavoidable lived experience for her that prepared her for change.

Cynthia's example demonstrates that the responsibility to nurture and support others is not exclusive of serving the self and individual aspirations. In fact, the need to provide for others encourages African-Caribbean women to qualify in careers, enhance their self-sufficiency and redefine their boundaries. The latter emanates from the realisation that they cannot help others if they do not look after themselves and their emotional wellbeing. In this context, both psychological and social reorganisation is necessary in order to undergo the process of bereavement and adapt to loss. Such experiences draw upon both traditional and modern understandings to transcend structural boundaries and limitations.

A psychological conceptualisation of grief is not exclusive of the possibility that the experience can be simultaneously perceived as social. This is because relationships are social experiences, and adaptation to loss involves changes in the social lives of the bereaved and restructuring. This is evident when we look at people who are not bound by responsibilities, and for this reason, they are not expected to grieve, but to recreate their lives (Stroebe and Schut, 1999). However, even those who are expected to grieve cannot complete their bereavement processes unless they restructure their social lives. Within social constraints they are resourceful and inventive in implementing changes that simultaneously help themselves, their dependants and communities. In chapter 8 I will talk in detail about the experiences of women and the factors involved in their bereavement processes.

In this context, I would like to revisit the controversy on the assumed difference between psychological and sociological understandings of grief. Search within psychological processes reflects desire to implement social changes and is accompanied by purposeful and directed social action. For this reason, grief needs to be examined within a life course framework influenced by wider social processes.

### ***Bereavement – sociological process***

Grief's emotionality constitutes a valid hypothesis but it does not describe how loss is experienced apart for a section of the population who encounter additional obstacles – usually embedded in socio-cultural structures - in transforming their social lives. Mrs Grace confessed that she could not see the death of her husband coming, that 'loss was a difficult thing to handle' and that her children worried about her and encouraged her to engage in social activities because she 'was not coping properly'. Cynthia also received assistance from her mother-in-law who moved in with her to look after the children while she was deconstructing her life in counselling, and putting it back together in a different order. However, even for those women grief was part of a wider simultaneous process of bereavement that promoted adjustment to loss and social reorganisation.

Mrs Grace managed to 'let-go' of grief and 'moved-on' to take caring and helping roles within her Christian community. Initially, she structurally changed her life by learning to live as a single woman. Although she did not like the experience, she stayed true to her cultural origins which emphasise patience and perseverance, and continued looking after herself even though all she wanted to do was to grieve.

*'And I tell you, I have never ever (pauses) gone to my bed without food. I have never ever look untidy. People always tell me how good I look and so forth. My bills, even though I find that sometimes it's a little bit difficult. Always, always.'*

With investment in the belief that there is a higher purpose to her grief that she justified by developing unconditional trust in God, she learned to organise herself and her household without the support of her husband. She trusted blindly God's promise to be 'a husband to the widows, and father to the fatherless' and she 'made a promise to believe in his promise'. With dedicated effort she also realised that her husband could still be there for her, assisting her life and providing protection. One day while trying to fix something she remembered her deceased husband who would have ordinarily performed such duties. She started crying because she missed him and felt lonely and powerless. At this moment, she suddenly felt strong, took courage and fixed it feeling that she was guided by an external force. Another day while sitting in her living-room she realised that the wallpaper that they had chosen together actually created an impression with their initials on it: G for Grace and J for Jason.

Moments of feeling connected to the deceased were not explained by Mrs Grace in Christian terms but they could be compatible with historical cosmological understandings that despite the disruptive experience of slavery re-incorporated earlier African spiritual traditions that allows the world of the dead to enter the material world of the living. Continuing bonds led to a full re-evaluation of her husband that empowered her to continue her life. At the same time, being respectable was important to her within a racialised order in which she had to keep earning an income and in which her presentation of a managed self provided means of survival.

The main difference that Mrs Grace and her husband had during their married life was his overzealous dedication and commitment to the African-Caribbean heritage community. Mr Jason would financially assist community members, including a woman within whom he had a son (this is legitimate male role in racialised contexts of scarce resources where community survival is a higher value compared to individual integrity, according to Gordon, 1997). Mrs Grace accepted the arrangement, but she did not necessarily condone it. In her attempt to come to terms with her husband's loss, and by exercising reflection upon Jason's life and social circumstances, she gained a perspective upon his motives. By appreciating that in a context of social disadvantage his identity was culturally legitimate and supported the community, Mrs Grace went back to the people that her husband had known personally and offered her services to the community. She taught children and looked after the elderly. By widening and expanding her social participation she managed to 'let-go' of grief. In this respect, her understanding of the psychological experience of grief allowed her within a restrictive social framework to reorganise her life, find new roles and networks, and develop a reflexive appreciation of her place in society of which she could be a part.

Mrs Grace emphasised the role of attachment to her husband as an important factor in her grief. However, bereavement as a process of social reorganisation does not necessarily rely upon attachment relationships in order to take place. Cynthia's example demonstrates that grief for the loss of a loved one to death reinvigorates grief for other losses within a life-course that do not necessarily rely upon attachment relationships. Jamaica Kincaid (1996) confirms this observation:

*'It was the time of the day when all you have lost is heaviest in your mind: your mother, if you have lost her; your home, if you have lost it; the voices of people who*

*might have loved you or who you only wish have loved you; the places in which something good, something you cannot forget happened to you'*

Klass's (2006) argument that attachment is a wider concept that includes a range of social relationships potentially explains why people grieve multiple losses that the end of an attachment relationship through death resurfaces. It can also explain why some people grieve the loss of relationships that were important to their social lives. Mr Thompson explained that he did not grieve by missing the presence of his former wife when she died because they were not living together. Instead, he idealised the role that she had played in his life and saw it in new light. Having believed during their married life that she had actually undermined his prospects to realise acceptable male identifications in a professional career in the Royal Air Force (RAF), he reconsidered his views and redefined his perspective. His emotional pain stemmed from the unforgiving realisation that he had actually led his life under misconceptions about his social position and relationships, hurting his loved ones in the process. For this reason, he struggled with loneliness and lack of security in old age. Bereavement for Mr Thompson led to emotional reorganisation in the context of a life review (Butler, 1963) in preparation for his end-of-life. In a life perspective that includes the experience of mortality this is equally valuable because acceptance of death enables the bereaved to reorganise their relationships and find fulfilment and consolation.

Mr Thompson's grief was the outcome of the way in which his loss implicated with a variety of relationships. For this reason, the widening of definitions of attachment to include not only family but also community and social relationships as suggested by Klass (2006), may actually serve to explain a greater variety of experiences of bereavement in which sociological explanations will be insightful.

A main theme running through the next two chapters is that bereavement reflects the life shared with the deceased. If that relationship has been positive, or even satisfactory, people find a way to adapt to loss. If negative, bereavement's reorganisation encounters additional obstacles, as it does when stigma and prejudices are at play. Fred, a gay man, struggled in his bereavement for the loss of his grandmother. He had only met her 3 times throughout his life, upon visits in St Vincent in the Caribbean. His issue was that he suffered social disadvantage and exclusion within his own family and African-Caribbean community due to his sexual identity, which is largely stigmatised in the context of vulnerability and racialisation and need to prove coherence and personal integrity. His grandmother was the only person that actually accepted him unconditionally through identification with ancestral cosmological understandings that link life and death, the known and unknown and accept all life. For this reason, he grieved her loss. Although he re-experienced the pain of past memories of loss, the positive short-lived relationship with his grandmother in the Caribbean empowered him to implement considerable changes to his social life and incorporate his understandings and identity into a career that offers services to humanity.

The quality of relationships that shape bereavement are embedded within structural patterns, and are influenced by culture and stereotypes within a given social organisation. Therefore, bereavement is a sociological process not solely conditioned by the psychological pain of grief, which is the outcome of loss of a loved one. Through the process of bereavement people do what psychologists would call 'letting-go' of grief, which means that they transform emotional pain into creativity, and restructure their social lives and identities. In this respect, 'letting-go' does not necessarily imply 'letting-go of the deceased'. The bereaved find new social roles that benefit their social lives, and incorporate the legacy of the deceased in it. Meaning-making processes and practices of continuing bonds serve such purposes, and I will demonstrate these arguments in the next two chapters.

Apart from differences in perspective and orientation, also reflected upon their preoccupation with different but parallel concepts, psychological and sociological theories have similar potential. The meaning of loss is being deconstructed while the bereaved tries to adapt to social life. In psychological grief literature this is conceptualised in the dual process model of grief model (Stroebe and Schut, 1999), which refers to the experience of alternating between coping and grieving. During the process of adaptation to loss the experience is often revisited even when the bereaved are already reorganising their lives, because circumstances change and so does their relationship to it (Klass, Silverman and Nickman, 1996).

The understanding of loss within a sociological framework also involves the transcendence and transformation of aspects of the social life of the bereaved that cause conflict in their relationships, and ultimately emotional disturbance during bereavement. Continuing bonds to the deceased play key role in evaluating relationships and implementing the required changes. As we have seen in the examples presented so far changes in perception, which are the outcome of reflection upon the deceased and their racialised position and its link to the racialised position of the bereaved, are applied upon new endeavours to restructure careers and relationships. According to Walter (1999) this is the outcome of lack of social regulation in postmodern societies that provide a greater variety of options to the bereaved. A modernist perspective that promotes wellbeing persists within postmodern conceptualisations of loss, but the latter go further in that they take into consideration bereavement processes of social reorganisation. When we examine racialised communities, structural relationships are highlighted and validate a sociological relationship.

In African-Caribbean heritage experiences bereavement's reorganisation processes are compounded by structural inequalities, stereotypes, prejudices or stigma. Under these circumstances psychologists would argue that the bereaved struggle to adapt and are more likely to experience 'complicated grief' (Prigerson et al., 1995; Horowitz et al., 1997) or 'pathology' (Lindemann, 1944; Engel, 1961; Fachingbauer et al., 1977). However, in this chapter I will argue that historical interactions with the experience of grief and the need to reorganise in order to survive dehumanising circumstances constructed a culture that inflects bereavement processes. Cultural practices, meanings and identification processes create the pre-conditions on the basis of which processes of reorganisation following loss described in chapters 7 and 8 take place.

### **Attitudes of acceptance**

Race and gender have been identified as social factors that shape death, dying and bereavement (Field, Hockey and Small, 1997). However, theorisations of related contextual relationships have not been systematic analysed. This thesis deconstructs race and gender in the context of African-Caribbean heritage community organisation and offers limited evidence-based theorisation. Bereavement is the outcome of structural determinants upon behaviour and interactions, but a culture of grief born out of historical struggles to survive in adversity inflects experiences. In this section, I will focus upon the latter; the way in which people of African-Caribbean heritage create meaning out of bare life (Noys, 2005) by cultivating awareness that loss is unavoidable, and reinforcing the necessary strategic responses that promote social adaptation and survival. An attitude of acceptance and willingness to work upon its cultivation is one such strategy and there are a number of historical and religious narratives, as well as, cultural processes that include and communicate this ethical principle.



John's life is shaped by discourses that defined him as a deviant young black man, exclusions at school and limited employment opportunities. His mother was not understanding towards the tensions he was experiencing within his social environment and condemned him for being 'not good enough'. The stereotypes pushed him further into crime where he could gain a sense of self-worth and confidence in his power and ability to defend himself. When his mother died he struggled through grief with the same issues that created his unhappiness, guilt, lack of stable relationships and a generalised sense of having failed in life. His mother made sure to reiterate to John what she thought of him by excluding him from her will. Bereavement in John's case at age 50 made him relive the struggles of his early adult life; but by this time he had drawn a different path in life. After further encounters with loss and the death of his brother, John found meaning in spirituality, philosophy, history and Christianity, and at the time of the interview he was involved in charitable community work.

By developing historical knowledge through research and becoming involved in African-Caribbean heritage religious communities, John learned to be patient and gained a tolerant perspective on loss and social disadvantage. His relationship to Christianity started earlier in his late 30s when he joined a monastery for a year in order to disengage from the streets and crime and find salvation in God. Continuing participation in Christian practice and membership in African-Caribbean heritage religious communities have transformed his earlier life. John now knows that he must be patient and that if he fails it will be his last chance to change his life, and create a better future with loving relationships. Acceptance and care by the community taught him humility, understanding and forgiveness, and the studying of Christian scripts cultivates a perspective that finds meaning in life beyond loss and suffering, embedded in the spiritual fulfilment of being with God.

I visited the Pentecostal church that John regularly attends only to observe that the central meaning of religious practice communicates the defiance of oppression, transcendence of loss, trauma and wrongdoings and salvation in the charity of God. In this way, people of African-Caribbean heritage accept present loss and suffering, trust life by trusting God and continue living ethically in adversity. It is worth noting that not everyone I spoke with during the course of this research was practicing Christian. If they were, it was not necessarily the central narrative to draw references from. Acceptance is also a principle learned in the context of post-migration rejection and suffering, as well as throughout the turbulent history of slavery and colonial subordination in the Caribbean. Christianity and spirituality served to affirm and communicate such views and perspectives among people impacted by racism and social disadvantage.

John also studied history being influenced by Black Power politics and the Civil Rights movement, popular when he was teenager. Knowing about the historical struggles of his ancestors in slavery and colonialism, and observing continuing patterns of subordination in England he contextualised and further trusted the religious meanings that equip him with acceptance and reinforce his commitment to fight injustice. His ambition is to become a paradigmatic example for other young black men at risk of social exclusion. John now wants to study theology and write his autobiography.

Another participant that I briefly talked to because he did not want to be interviewed - but willingly trusted the following information - was a man involved in crime that struggled to justify his belonging in England throughout his life. For this reason, he was restless in coming to terms with his social exclusion. He found peace after his mother's death when during his bereavement process he started visiting the library regularly to study history. By learning that Bristol was one of the ports that facilitated the Transatlantic trade he found a

justification for his presence and legitimately claimed his belonging by imagining routes and movement of people, ships and goods transferred between continents. George was too sensitive to talk about his mother and their relationship, but he felt content and at peace.

Black masculinities experienced additional problems in coming to terms with their social disadvantage because the power and affluence that defines male value and worth by dominant colonial ideologies was denied to them. Christianity and history promote realisation of their social experience and propose a method with which they can survive, transform their lives and live defiantly in a society that has commonly excluded them. Bereavement is the time that they resolve those issues. The reality that relationships with the deceased were complicated by racism and disadvantage makes social readjustment imperative to bereavement. Part of the process is acceptance of loss and suffering, its recognition as part of life, and commitment to survival and personal transformation.

For others acceptance can be a response to challenge and does not need to be cultivated in religious instruction or the teaching of history because it was learned during early socialisation. Mr Howarth learned the value of acceptance when he worked as assistant to a plantation owner in Barbados. He enjoyed the privilege of living in what used to be the plantation's Great House where masters lived and drove one of the few cars on the island. Because of his material comfort he also managed to create a stable family that secured him continuing wellbeing right through into old age. After his migration to the United Kingdom, Mr Howarth became the first bus driver well before bus conductors were hired in the South West of England after a bus boycott in 1963 (Dresser, 1986). He also worked alongside British owners in a business as general manager utilising the same skills of negotiation of racialised relationships that he had learned in a racially divided Florida where he studied plantation agriculture, and at the sugar plantation in Barbados. By accepting racial hierarchy,

Mr Howarth went further into realising success by Western standards, material comfort and wellbeing. His community recognised him as a charismatic leader and he encouraged respect in others. As many of his compatriots he condemned their post-migration rejection and harassment, and searched into his identity with the aim to construct a personal legacy that he was able to connect to community and ancestry. However, his patience and acceptance of life as it comes established a stability that eased challenges and transitions, including bereavement.

Mr Howarth lost two children to multiple sclerosis and his sister in a single year, and despite what would have been considered catastrophic and irreparable loss, he accepted fate stoically and patiently. His way of communicating to me his loss reflected his accepting approach towards life. He refused to conceptualise the experience and he would spend hours at the organisation where I met him regularly, showing me pictures and archives of documents and certificates that belonged to his children. I cross-referenced Mr Howarth's response with another member who confirmed to me that both Mr Howarth and his wife are very rational and pragmatic people who endured 2 of their 5 children's death with stoicism. Characteristically, she told me that they never complained, continued attending community events and meetings and behaved compassionately towards their dying children and the nurses that looked after them. They would also run fundraising activities and support the hospices that helped them. They even went to Russia and volunteered themselves to research on multiple sclerosis. However, a genetic connection was not established.

Even when the realisation of masculinity is not the issue at hand encouraging active defiance of racism or acceptance of the racialised order in society as strategy to empowerment, the majority of African-Caribbean people are simply aware of their social position and the role that race plays in it. They focus upon dismantling the obstacles to upward mobility that they

encounter in their everyday lives through a hard work ethic, and confront the issue at hand which is causing the inequality. Cynthia is well informed about the historical experience of slavery, has studied history and black women's literature and conceptualises slavery as a negative experience that equips people with resilience after having survived loss and trauma. She has looked into her ancestry in order to find out where she is coming from, 'having been mixed-up so much during slavery and colonialism'. Knowing her origins allows her to gain a perspective upon empowerment that comes from having survived suffering. Cynthia defines herself as a 'fighter' and has achieved upward mobility despite adversity and hardship in society and family relationships. She recognises historical patterns of disadvantage and residues of relationships of subordination, and within the education system she fights to promote her children's equal opportunities, just like her mother used to do for her and her siblings. Her approach to challenges is pragmatic and involves rationalisation of the experience, and acknowledgement that it is linked to historical processes of racialization and marginalisation.

In bereavement Cynthia claims that the African-Caribbean heritage community adopts a measured approach that accepts loss and there are ritualistic practices in place to represent the transition and re-incorporate the bereaved family into social life. When her 'parents' (her uncle and aunt) died, she felt lost, and stayed at home for 6 months, allowing herself time and space to grieve and resolve other issues that had been neglected for a long time. She then resumed work and childcare responsibilities. She claims that all along and despite her psychological turmoil she knew what was happening and consciously made the decision to deconstruct and rationalise the experience in order to transcend the pain of loss and source of all suffering in her life. Her psychological understanding of grief reflects her rationalising and accepting approach to bereavement. Cynthia's issue - besides the pain of loss - was her relationships within an unequal social structure, her lack of power and agency, and her

racialised and gendered status - all of which she managed to address by implementing fundamental changes to her relationships. At this stage, her on-and-off relationship to her former husband, father of her 4 children, ended. All along she maintained reflexive communication with the racialised position of black women in Western societies as a guide and principle to help her resolve bereavement's impasse.

Acceptance is not a passive response to loss. It requires acknowledgement, recognition and conceptual understanding of social and psychological issues in an intergenerational perspective. For this reason, it is a strategy employed in order to influence events and dynamically change personal strategies and practices with which to shape social circumstances and overcome structural and cultural limitations. It stems from an individualistic, modernist and Western framework of dealing with loss influenced by African-Caribbean peoples' historical interaction with the British culture. However, when the element of understanding race relations in historical perspective is missing this approach is ineffective. It only becomes meaningful when it is able to provide a counter-narrative to loss and trauma that includes their racialised and gendered position in Western societies. It is a concept that acknowledges life and culture born out of historical loss and trauma, or 'bare life' (Noys, 2005).

Anne despite being equipped with determination and a fighting spirit struggled to overcome the boundaries that prevented her from realising the changes necessary to complete bereavement. Although she advocated a Christian ethic that encouraged her to defy wrongdoings and oppression, she did not explore black history in the Western world and identified with an ahistorical British African-Caribbean heritage. For this reason, Anne fought her way through an educational system that stereotyped her as underachiever and misdiagnosed her dyslexia as lack of ability, but her lack of a racialised conceptualisation

prevented her from confronting the issue at hand. Her response towards her father's death was to try and overcome the obstacles that prevented her from studying and building a career path that she values, contributes to common good and fulfils her. However, the academic and professional difficulties encountered in the process prolonged her grief and suffering. Anne continued to articulate religious notions of empowerment found in concepts of 'fighting injustice' and 'defiance', which are in line with messages communicated by social movements claiming racial equality.

Grief and bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage experiences is diverse because people relate differently to the social structures in place, as well as, their historical legacy and culture. The British-born generations are at an advantageous position of being familiar with British society and, therefore, assertive of their citizenship, rights and belonging. However, socialisation into a society that stereotypes them can have disempowering effects, either in the form of responding to social inequality with anger and aggression or fear. And as Aristotle claimed:

*'Anyone can become angry...that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way...this is not easy.'*

(Aristotle quoted in Leonard et al., 1944: 203)

Either response is not conducive to the rationalisation of their social position and the objective of planned reorganisation. A balanced approach to confrontation that assesses the issues involved in the encounter and responds with awareness is transformative. Mr Thompson who was interested in participating in white society on equal terms achieved his goal by maintaining inner equilibrium and not giving credit to racism. However, his example

is an exception, and although he maintained personal integrity, racism continued to be part of his experience because his objective stance did not adequately confront it. Pain and suffering is not exclusive of rationalisation, and occasionally difficult decisions are necessary in contexts of social disadvantage. These enhance acceptance, tolerance and courage.

### **Emotionality and expression**

Related to the attitude of acceptance towards loss described above is an observed approach towards the expression of grief among people of African-Caribbean heritage. Within the bereavement literature there is the understanding that in Western European cultures, people lack ways and avenues of expressing their grief over loss (Walter, 1999; Hockey, 1996) while in other cultures people cope better with death because they express their grief in elaborate rituals. However, such an assumption has been questioned (Hockey, 1996), and as I will be indicating after Walter (1999), rituals do not always resolve grief, but can compound the experience.

Furthermore, African-Caribbean heritage bereavement case examples indicate that marginalised communities remain suspicious towards outsiders and prefer not to conceptualise their grief in counselling while it has been argued that people in the West make ample use of the 'discipline of the therapeutic' (Small, 2001) and bereavement services. In research that I conducted with bereavement counselling organisations and a local hospice I heard counsellors' concerns that ethnic minorities prefer not to use their services and remain under-represented. In their efforts to enhance inclusion they welcome 'experts' who are willing and capable of 'educating' them on the ways of 'others' so that they can create a space for them in which they can feel comfortable and receive help. However, efforts in



Britain so far have resulted in ‘cultural factfiles’ that do not represent the lived experience of ethnic minorities which is characterised by diversity (Gunaratnam, 1997), and for this reason, they have not managed to change ethnic minority representation within their services. A counsellor in an urban multicultural city commented:

*‘I look out of the window and I see a multicultural city but this is not reflected in our service.’*

The uniqueness of African-Caribbean heritage experiences would require a basic understanding of their historical background in order to make sense not only of grief but also of their death rituals. Cultural factfiles (Gunaratnam, 1997) lack such depth of knowledge and are merely descriptive rather than analytical. African-Caribbean people’s understanding of death and loss is informed by their post-migration experience of harassment, loss and social exclusion that draws direct links to slavery’s dehumanisation, death and trauma. The topic remains a social taboo and it is difficult for people who come from the two opposite ends of the historical experience to establish rapport in the sensitive environment of counselling practice. For this reason, African-Caribbean people avoid using mainstream counselling services.

The difficulty to establish trust in race relations that would enable constructive communication has been compromised by incidences of racially motivated crime that led to some well publicised deaths within the African-Caribbean community in Britain that eventually changed policy and social relationships. Some deaths that bonded the community in collective mourning because they raised a sentiment that everyone could identify with, contribute to the understanding of life born out of bare existence. They indicate to African-Caribbean heritage people that they are not protected by their citizenship status, that their

colour provides a reason for victimisation and that historically they are survivors that kept recreating their lives from death and loss. These are delicate issues that require skill and compassionate handling in counselling.

The most important such death in the immediate memory of the African-Caribbean community has been the killing of teenager Stephen Lawrence in April 1993 in Eltham, London by a group of white young people later convicted for racially motivated murder. The incident mobilised the community because the teenager and his family were ordinary working class migrants who were stereotyped by the police during the process of investigation. It took 19 years of dedicated legal campaign by the deceased's mother to finally prosecute 2 of the 5 people that took part in the attack that led to her son's murder. Stephen Lawrence's death shed light to everyday experiences of racialization and proved that the issue at hand was not black criminality but racism and stereotyping. The murder left an important legacy changing governmental policy and police procedures following the publication of the Macpherson (1999) report. Stephen Lawrence has entered the family of African-Caribbean martyrs that died in order to create opportunities and give life to fellow community members. The imagery of Stephen is used in this manner, as a shadow that will always shed upon the present to police behaviour and racist misconduct. Characteristically, when his murderers were making an exit from the courts exhibiting violent, unapologetic and arrogant behaviour a poster in the background with Stephen's image on it operated as a reminder and as threat that justice would be served (Panorama, 2012). According to Brown (2008) martyrs existed since slavery when death was the reaper and harvester that takes but also gives life.

Understanding that life can tap upon death in order to gain significance can be difficult for people who live in safety and a secure cultural location. For this reason, people of African-

Caribbean heritage prefer to talk about grief within their own social circles, family and kin networks with people who share their perspectives and accept loss. Talking about grief in order to express sorrow over loss would contradict religious beliefs in the afterlife, as well as, cultural attitudes that prescribe stoicism and level-headedness in order to survive adversity.

*'You see, the point with us is where we are going to end up...you either going to meet that person again because you are a Christian and you are going to end up with God and the whole theory of the whole service and all that, you say goodbye until you meet again. You are saying goodbye to them now but if you are a good Christian and they are a good Christian, you not need to worry because you are going to meet again anyway.'*

(Mr Thompson)

Grief is accepted as part of losing a loved one to death and there are cultural processes in place to manage the process. Cynthia informed me that they practice the nine night - also described elsewhere in the literature (Simpson, 1957; Henriques, 1951) - that starts immediately after the death when relatives, friends and community members visit the home of the deceased in order to commemorate them with the family and make offerings of food and drink. Beatrice, a community manager, expressed her concern that after the funeral the bereaved are left alone and this is the time that the reality kicks in and they start to grieve. This is also when Beatrice and other community members – mainly women that take the role of informal care givers - start making phone-calls to check on the bereaved and visit their home to engage in informal therapeutic conversations. Cynthia who is qualified in counselling argued that conversations within the community are psychotherapeutic because they involve expression of the emotional issue followed by reflection by the listener. She

argued that this is the relationship that she had with her uncle and aunt and it is one of the reasons that she missed them when they died. Beatrice described an encounter with a bereaved community member who felt lonely after the loss of her husband and would not even dare to sit on his chair in the living-room. Beatrice sat on his chair and started talking to the bereaved until they laughed and commemorated him.

Community members are also encouraged to attend regular events and meetings where they create a legacy of the deceased by incorporating them in collective memory. The organisation where I carried out my fieldwork provides such opportunities. Over the years, they have built a collection of videos, letters, photographs and material artefacts that commemorate members who died. Their contribution to the organisation is remembered and their presence is included. Such interactions assert the likelihood to find meaning and love in adversity, and for this reason, the community provides a safe environment that serves the emotional needs of its members.

The instrumentality of managed grief serves the African-Caribbean community's objective of survival. Death is a familiar experience and this is precisely the reason for which the bereaved need to persevere in order to maintain the community by remembering and honouring the dead. Maintaining level-headedness serves to avoid manipulation of their vulnerability by people who are hostile towards them or just unaware of their subjectivity. The latter represents a long-standing historical pattern that originates in slavery when slaves avoided showing pain to their masters who would take advantage of their vulnerability and question their humanity (Resenblatt and Wallace, 2005a&b). Doreen Lawrence, Stephen Lawrence's mother, has turned into a public figure influencing policy and practice in Britain but keeps her grief private. She does not release photographs or belongings of Stephen to the media, believing that one, and only one, photograph is enough to serve the purpose of

pursuing justice and equality, and acting as a remembrance symbol that everyone in British society can identify with. She also tries to avoid getting overwhelmed by grief because she would not be able to get involved in activism and mobilise for equality.

*'No, I can't read it, no. I don't know, I find it difficult. Cause when I look at, you know, what he could achieve and his work here, I just, em, no. I am not ready to read this yet. In the early days there was days when I locked myself in my room, I didn't come out, and that was really a dark place. And I know once you in this it is very difficult to take yourself back out. And I was worried about allowing myself to go back there.'*

(Doreen Lawrence in BBC News, 2012)

Persevering and staying strong serves the purpose of reinforcing the community's survival while well-calculated and educated activism promotes greater equality, acquisition of rights and change in society's attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Other African-Caribbean heritage community members in Britain did not lose their children to racially motivated crime but they identify with the experience because they also feel racialised, their experience has been structurally benefited by the mobilisation of Stephen Lawrence's family and they empathise with the concept of loss. Although the experience of death and racialization of African-Caribbean people in Britain is empowering it is emotionally challenging because it involves lessons learned in the process of adverse growth. As Fred argued 'it is really hard and it does not need to be this way'. He was reflecting upon his entire life at the age of 46 after the death of his grand-mother for which he was still grieving. For this reason, it serves people of African-Caribbean heritage to maintain a sense of control over their grief that helps them persevere and survive under circumstances that would ordinarily be perceived as catastrophic. An attitude of hardiness is socially sanctioned because it builds resilience and

serves survival purposes. I will talk about this in detail shortly. I will firstly look at death rituals to examine the meanings of death that they denote and how they shape perceptions and behaviour.

### **African-Caribbean death ritual: the politics of grief**

People of African-Caribbean heritage contradict their conservative approach towards the verbal expression of grief and innermost feelings with the performance of elaborate and celebratory death rituals about which they talk with enthusiasm. Whenever I invited research participants to discuss experiences of bereavement they would always begin with an account of African-Caribbean funerary rituals. African-Caribbean death rituals are conducive to the purpose of defying oppression, and in this way, express the generalised sentiment and political message of a disadvantaged community at the same time that they communicate understandings of death and loss. They provide an avenue of communication with the wider society that would not have taken place by more direct means given the nature of race relations and competitive historical interactions.

African-Caribbean death rituals represent a protest against racism and social exclusion, and as I will be highlighting, succeed in reinforcing community, empowerment and survival. They carry the meanings of the ephemerality of life, acceptance of loss, and opportunity born out of suffering in their expressive culture and the notions that they articulate. For this reason, people of African-Caribbean heritage reproduce and transplant their mortuary traditions in British diasporic contexts and publicise their practice. They also inflect culture in order to represent their diasporic experience, and for this reason, rituals appear in hybridised forms that enable the bereaved to draw links between the diasporic locations and homeland, as well as explore traditions and genealogy (Soto-Crespo & Kinkaid, 2002). Their

effectiveness lies not in the elaborate nature of their performance but in their representation of lived experience.

The central message that African-Caribbean mortuary rites convey, in historical perspective, is defiance against dehumanisation through celebrations of life. In contexts where people are marginal, elaborate celebrations of death give them the opportunity to be noticed while they indirectly communicate experiences of hardship. It is a very powerful, assertive and legitimate way of negotiating social relationships, because death can be seen as a human right that elicits respect, since it is universal and unavoidable. Under circumstances of oppression, death also highlights acts of injustice that may have caused mortality or early death. Historically, in slave societies masters would not interfere with slaves' death rites and would even provide them with the raw materials needed to bury their dead, as well as, rum and food for the celebrations that followed (Walvin, 2001; Genovese, 1972). Slaves, on the other hand, found the opportunity to create community, negotiate culture and survive in the practice of death rituals (Genovese, 1972). They utilised their African cultural capital as well as notions of servitude to construct a culture of defiance.

Slaves' death rituals were celebratory because death signalled salvation from slavery and a return journey to Africa to join a family of dead ancestors (Brown, 2008). Slavery enhanced the importance of traditional African beliefs in the afterlife, which offered the prospect of freedom and confronted existential insecurities and present meaninglessness (Walvin, 2001). For this reason, funerals celebrated the passage of the deceased to the otherworld and recreated community on the basis of the belief that if there is no promise in present life, there is at least in the certainty of death. Death also had the potential to be utilised in slave resistance, because reminders of mortality threatened the existential security of the ruling elite who had a lot to lose by dying. For this reason, slaves administered curses, spells and

even attempted to take the life of their oppressors (Brown, 2008) in the context of grief's liminality.

Slave death rituals were very important in negotiating dehumanisation and provided opportunities for community regeneration. Freed spirits could find redemption and funerals initiated the process by carrying out inquests on any wrongdoings that had taken place against the deceased. Social issues were addressed in this way, policing behaviour, redefining community values and asserting the need for change. Slavery and the community's response to death underlined understandings of mortality as life-giving. For this reason, alongside serving the purposes of mourning, they were utilised and adjusted to deliver political messages. In the case of martyrs political messages at funerals were direct (Brown, 2008), but all African-Caribbean funerals historically represented sites of political contestation.

African-Caribbean rituals in more recent history serve similar purposes of defiance against inequality, and although practices – especially in the diaspora – have diversified, they maintain their celebratory character. Tradition and history need to be remembered to put into perspective continuing patterns of racialization in the Western world. In this way, continuing patterns of death, dying and bereavement construct collective memory, ancestry and community. It is likely that in the immediate years before migration to the United Kingdom when the aim was assimilation in a colonial cultural framework, the political character of death lost its centrality but traditions persisted. During the nine-night ritual, death was celebrated and inquests were performed to culminate the soul of the deceased and stop the spirit from wondering among the living. Besides, poverty kept death familiar and the celebratory customs relevant because they conveyed acceptance of unavoidable fate in hardship. In response to material inequality and sharp disparities in the distribution of



resources coupled by the desire to realise ideals of affluence prevalent among white privilege, African-Caribbean people in the Caribbean to this day utilise funerals to communicate power and worth. They organise ostentatious and extravagant funerals and spend generously on rituals that enable marginalised people to leave this world on equal terms. For marginalised masculinities this is an important way of asserting power and worth (Paul, 2007). Childe (1945) and Cannon (1989) have observed that more powerful groups do not use funerals to display social status. For example, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century white Britain held minimal funerals, while 21<sup>st</sup> century middle classes in Britain continued the pattern in order to celebrate postmaterial values such as personality or ecology. The elaborate mortuary displays of disadvantaged groups within this context stand out as contradictory, but the practice serves the purpose of defiance to inequality.

In contemporary Britain, African-Caribbean death rituals have hybridised but also maintain their traditional function of defiance against racism and oppression. They combine an approach to death and funeralisation in line with that of the wider British society that also carries the historical meanings of hardship and acceptance rooted in slavery and the historical experience of subordination. During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to attend one funeral. I was not invited to the church service or the burial but I found a role at the 'funeral party' by offering to assist a team of African-Caribbean heritage women that provided catering and informal pastoral care to the bereaved family. The encounter had a ritualistic character and displayed a process that united the bereaved in the memorialisation of the deceased. The funeral commemorated the death of a 69 year old man. His wife, children and their families sat around a table at the centre of the room from where they could see and receive all their guests. People once they entered the room would be given a cup of soup in order to take the funeral's and cold weather's 'chill' away. They then approached the bereaved family to pay their respects. Once this was done, they queued for food. But again

there was order with priority given to the disabled, those in need of assistance and the elderly. The rest waited until later to repeat the same procedure while having a drink at the bar.

The bereaved family and especially the wife of the deceased did not embrace the 'jolly' atmosphere of the encounter but behaved stoically, expressing her grief in this way. She greeted all her guests in order to share loving thoughts towards the deceased husband, and although she seemed distracted and an observer in the celebrations, she fulfilled all her social responsibilities, according to the culture of loss underpinning death and dying in African-Caribbean heritage communities. The funeral was largely a social event that aimed to recreate community, gather its members, and assert their uniqueness and social experience. The family had the opportunity to reconnect and acquire support from a strong community network that guarantees protection, historical continuity and survival. This is where their life and legacy will be deposited to save them from disappearing in their minority status. Death rituals reinforce 'primary' identifications (Geertz, 1963) that have to do with family, home and ancestry. This is the foundation upon which life in Britain is built because social disadvantage prevents inclusion. In this context, community represents a virtual home to which they return at the occasion of the funeral ritual in order to be consoled by people with similar experiences and identifications. Death alone reconnects with ancestry, family and home (Soto-Crespo & Kincaid, 2002), and these representations find their way in the funeral ritual.

The attitude towards ritualization at African-Caribbean funerals in Britain has been influenced by secularisation tendencies. There is no direct link to the spirit or inquests and cleansing ceremonies. Instead, there is stoicism in attitudes towards loss, advance organisation, and rationalisation of the encounter. The latter could be seen as claim to citizenship status in Britain. However, partial incorporation, marginalisation and

racialization encourage contradictory tendencies and the need to claim justice beyond this material existence. Death rituals bring a historically marginalised community to identify with an ideology of justice and constitute contexts in which such meanings are asserted and ritualised.

African-Caribbean culture finds expression in celebratory funeral rituals where food, rum, drinks, reggae, soul, jazz and gospel music, and even marijuana are consumed. Mourners adopt symbolic codes of dress defined by glamour to make statements of defiance against subordination. The funeral provides the freedom to express disaffection because it reconnects with the immaterial world where higher justice prevails, drawing some distance from everyday reality. The liminality of the funeral liberates mourners from everyday responsibilities. They are temporarily lifted from their structural position while they accompany the deceased towards their journey to the otherworld. During this time they can boldly and with conviction assert their experience. The celebration of a culture which has been considered offensive in British history, and for this reason, it was stigmatised highlights the claim for equality and social incorporation into the British cultural framework. In this way, they attempt to change the definition of what it means to be English and add African-Caribbean notions to the category. Funerals where the issue of injustice is underlined by the mode of death itself are more explicit in the delivery of this message. Phillips and Phillips (1998: 186) comment upon the racially motivated murder of Kelso Cochrane, a carpenter from Antigua, in 1959:

*'The male chief mourners wore tuxedos, and the women were in brightly coloured summer dresses, with black armbands or patches. As they walked through the police cordon holding back the jostling crowds outside the church, they carried themselves*

*with the conscious dignity of people who knew they were playing on an important stage.'*

Justice was never delivered to this death as in many others linked to racially motivated crime (Jasper, 2011). Recently, in August 2011 in London the death of a black man during a police arrest operation caused rioting following complaints about the shooting by the deceased's family outside the Tottenham police station. Some media sources presented the deceased, Mark Duggan, as a criminal, and used out-of-context visual material to sentimentalise audiences (Martin & Greenwood, 2013; France & Polland, 2011; The Telegraph, 2011; Camber, 2011). Others tried to conceptualise it, while community representatives rushed to interpret and communicate the subjective experiences of black youth in Britain today. Professor Gus John<sup>13</sup> claimed that black youth live with the awareness that life expectancy among their peers is low and death is a possibility, while opportunities in life and society are not open to them (John, 2011). The disturbance and restlessness that the events caused invited reflection upon the causes of inequality, and encouraged search into ancestral experiences and their continuing influence. Participants of this research talked about austerity measures and the closure of youth centres that act as barriers to crime social problems among disadvantaged black ethnic minority communities in inner city centres.

On the second day of the riots, I overheard a conversation between three young people at the Black Cultural Archives in London. They were reflecting upon the incident and the riots. They were debating the effects of the historical experience of slavery upon their employment prospects, arguing that they are conditioned to believe that they are not good enough, and

---

<sup>13</sup> Professor Gus John (2009) in his early career studied theology and worked as gravedigger. He is an academic who became an orator and represents his community. His background in theology and his understanding of the experience of death and dying is reflected in his speeches that captivate audiences and empower marginalised people. He speaks from an inner knowledge informed by the appreciation of life as ephemeral. He is working with black youth in Britain who engage in criminal activity, and tries to build communication between them and the wider society in order to give them the opportunity to participate in social life.

that they have to subordinate white society. In essence, they believed that crime and rioting are products of unemployment, and they tried to address the root cause of the situation. During this liminal period social exclusion and marginality were revealed, and it was an opportunity to conceptualise political, economic and social relationships in order to promote social change.

The legal issues surrounding Mark Duggan's death have not yet been resolved, there is controversy and the meaning of its aftermath has not been adequately negotiated. However, there is solidarity within the African-Caribbean community and members are inclined to see it as a social problem that concerns them all. Without condoning crime but also without judging a particular way of life, community members conceptualise the underlying reasons that cause social problems and give rise to alternative cultural systems constructed as deviant. The representation of Mark Duggan's funeral reveals the alternative value system embraced by people who feel socially excluded and marginalised. Its ostentatious design and style can be read as a statement that represents the magnitude of the loss experienced. It also values a life neglected by society.

Since slavery African-Caribbean funerals follow a representational motif suitable for communicating continuing experiences of structural inequality. They also represent sites of political contestation because the liminality of death affirms and corroborates the constraints of racialization and social exclusion. On this occasion, grief motivates the symbolic expression of racialised subjectivity. Related cultural practices were developed and elaborated as needed to serve changing circumstances, but the main purpose that funerals served historically remained relatively constant.

George explained to me that African-Caribbean people do not talk about grief but prefer to keep the deceased close to their heart. They do not appear sad at a funeral but give them a good farewell and celebrate a life well lived. 'People who served the community have earned their right to a proper African-Caribbean funeral' (Melissa) that preserves their memory and in this way reinforces collective survival. For this reason, African-Caribbean funerals are helpful in grief, despite being financially and emotionally demanding upon the bereaved. As Olwig (2009) observes people will travel distances to attend funerals of people they barely know in order to build community in an otherwise scattered and not very well networked diaspora. Political emancipation in marginality represents another layer in their motivation to perform African-Caribbean funerary rituals. The custom of celebratory funerals complements the attitude of stoicism and acceptance of grief, and establishes networks of support that the survivors can utilise during their bereavement process.

### **Culture of grief as resilience**

Some African-American studies reviewed in chapter 2 report complicated and pathological responses to loss with problematic processes of adaptation, compounded mainly by structural inequalities and traumatic types of loss (Goldsmith et al., 2008; Laurie and Neymeyer, 2008; Burke et al., 2010). They theorise grief as 'complicated' (Horowitz et al, 1997) or 'traumatic' (Prigerson et al, 1999), suggesting that grief for loss by traumatic means is different (Neria and Litz, 2004; Kaltman and Bonanno, 2003; Rubin, Malkinson and Witztum, 2003). Although there are similarities, the post-slavery experience of black people in the Western world is diverse. In Britain colonial relationships encourage a sense of belonging, despite the post-migration experience of social exclusion. The perspective that we take in the study of grief also shapes the assumptions that we make about the experience. Social disadvantage may create additional problems in bereavement. However, when loss is

a driver in life, it will compound experiences of grief, but it will also shape adaptive strategies. In this section, I will indicate characteristics of resilience in African-Caribbean participants that promote adaptation and equip the bereaved with strength and energy to reorganise their social lives. Understandings of the meaning of loss and mortuary cultural practices are reflected upon these resilient attitudes.

The studies which identify pathology in experiences of grief among African-Americans employ diagnostic criteria of complicated grief, the decision rules of which used to define caseness are overly pathologizing a normal range of chronic postloss adaptation (Neria and Litz, 2004: 77). From a sociological perspective, Walter (2005-2006) adds to the debate that the term ‘complicated grief’ basically refers to ‘prolonged grief’, rather than a special or unique type of grief experiences, and its conceptualisation reflects a matter of regulation and control of an essentially chaotic experience in a modernist context. Characteristically, Walter (2005-2006: 71), after Foote and Frank (1999), describes grief as ‘undisciplined, risky and wild’ and considers complicated grief as a cultural, as well as, an individual psychological matter. Rosenblatt (2007) goes as far as to question the validity of the concept of ‘recovery’, which he theorises as a metaphor useful to health practitioners making the concept of pathology redundant. In reality, he adds, bereaved people never really overcome loss, and for this reason, we ought to see bereavements as journeys that change the bereaved in individualised and unique ways. ‘Recovery’ then reflects the state of grief in which painful emotions can be contained and do not interfere with practical aspects of life. To this debate I will add that the diagnostic constructs of psychological disorders are not historically, socially or culturally informed, and for this reason, they omit important insider meanings. Their focus upon individual psychology conceals social problems that cause behaviour perceived as pathological. Denham (2008: 393) is critical of assumptions that social groups

respond to historical trauma with dysfunction, exhibiting ‘signs of psychological or social distress’. In relation to the diagnostic categories he argues that they

*‘...frequently compound this tendency [the tendency to pathologise by defining social suffering and political upheaval, such as violence, colonialism and poverty, as individual psychological disorders rather than considering social factors and the larger political-economic environment.]’*

Denham (2008: 393)

People who identify with a traumatic historical background and who have themselves struggled in marginality have developed strategies of coping with suffering and grief, and for this reason, they appear resilient and adaptive to loss. People of African-Caribbean heritage that participated in this research have struggled in their bereavement with the social issues of their racialised status, but benefited from the experience because it gave them the opportunity to implement structural changes and transform their lives. Knowing that they will grieve and suffer but grow from the experience, they deployed learned and culturally informed adaptive strategies to mobilise the transition.

Bonanno (2004: 27) theorised resilience as the characteristic ability of the greatest majority of people to maintain relatively stable and healthy levels of psychological functioning in bereavement, and even flourish ‘in the face of what otherwise would seem to be potentially debilitating events’. Further, he questioned the assumption about the inevitability of grief in loss and argued that the vast majority of individuals exposed to loss or other life-threatening events ‘do not exhibit chronic symptom profiles’ but ‘show the type of healthy functioning suggestive of the resilience trajectory’ (Bonanno, 2004: 22). He further identified ‘hardiness’, ‘self-enhancement’, ‘repressive coping’ and ‘positive emotion and laughter’ as



the main characteristics of resilience. Participants of this research exhibit Bonanno's characteristics, but we need to take into consideration the contextual factors in order to understand processes that construct resilience.

Hardiness in African-Caribbean experiences reflects answers that people provide to existential questions raised and negotiated throughout history under the stress and strain of loss. People of African-Caribbean heritage always had to construct meaning out of immaterial values that connected them to their ancestry and loved ones who died, in the afterlife. They appreciate that a better life can be found beyond material hardship, and that death is part of their process of reconstruction and renewal that keeps the community alive. By dying and grieving they mobilise political processes of identification, which are conducive to social change and development. In this way, death is constructed as socially and politically functional, and there are cultural processes in place to ritualise adaptation to loss.

People of African-Caribbean heritage have come to construct a counter-narrative of death in Western world contexts that draws upon, but at the same time, contradicts modernist meanings. Tapping upon modernist notions of immortality they construct it in the afterlife. In this sense, their meanings represent postcolonial critical narratives that communicate subjective marginal experiences. However, in order to come to terms with this alternative awareness and meaning of life they have to accept and embrace the experience of death and loss. A degree of hardiness is necessary in order to cultivate an alternative value system that is resilient to suffering.

Hardiness is the quality that enables people of African-Caribbean heritage to persevere and withstand suffering in order to allow time to ease the intensity of loss while they adapt and

change individual circumstances. Hybrid identifications rely upon this basic process. They reflect multiple mutations in the process of negotiation of loss. In this respect, they are adaptive and resilient identities constructed in the context of multiple and diverse encounters with loss, including historical dispossessions violence and dehumanisation as well as death, dying and bereavement. People who have experienced this process and changed in the face of loss, even if this loss was the result of racism or migration; adopt a hardy approach as a response to grief. They withstand emotional suffering with stoicism and acceptance. The attitude of being strong in grief serves this purpose and offers more constructive methods of persevering and promoting change.

Within the community this understanding has been culturally defined and elaborated, and ritualistically reproduced. Death, loss, bereavement and mortuary rituals promote processes of identification and community organisation. For this reason, people of African-Caribbean heritage feel that they have a social obligation towards their communities to remain strong and reproduce those rituals that promote social change in the context of negotiations of loss. This is how life is created out of 'bare life' (Noys, 2005). It is a life that values itself when material values are scarce, there is limited freedom and yet people value life, develop and prosper. Processes of consolation within the African-Caribbean community are also crucial to this process. People console each other in multiple ways, by being present, listening, giving feedback and attending. Frankl (2004) invented his logotherapy method from processes of consolation that took place between inmates during the Holocaust. It is a process that provides meaning to people in danger of losing purpose in suffering. In African-Caribbean experiences a form of logotherapy takes place in the context of casual interactions, acts of practical support and befriending practices.

Hardiness is actively reproduced by younger generations who organise in the same way as more senior members and set up new African-Caribbean heritage communities. During my fieldwork I made contacts with the African-Caribbean Society at a university in the South West of England, and attended one of their annual events that showcase their community and culture. Their structure and organisation was similar to what I had become acquainted with in other contexts. They organise in similar ways as their seniors, create supportive communities and remain firmly united. The event was not attended by a diverse student audience, and performances showcased internal friendships, relationships and community organisation. Characteristically, they described themselves as 'family' and projected a picture on the wall followed by a video that showcases their casual interactions, friendships and declare their love and commitment to each other.

Community among African-Caribbean university students demonstrates collaboration and teamwork. There is a clear division between young women and men with the former being more involved in the organisation of the event and participation in acts and performances. Although this may indicate constructions of masculinities and femininities there is higher value placed in community and supportive relationships. Students are interrelated and bound to one another to provide networks and environments supportive of educational objectives. Emphasis upon 'difference' also serves to assert identifications with the heritage of marginalisation and claims to belonging. It communicates a traditional but also open and discursive approach to social engagement.

I did not manage to gain access to younger peoples' meanings about death because they refused to take part in this research like most of their seniors. Bereavement might also be a difficult experience to relate to for younger people. Within their communities they acquire the support, care and protection needed. Starting from their communities they venture

outwards to gain qualifications, but the community is there to support them in the process. Talking about a sensitive issue to a stranger could undermine this process, as well as the value of hardiness they are progressively cultivating.

African-Caribbean identities and cultures are hybrid. However, the process of hybridity has been accelerated, and it is visible to observe in the experience of young people of mixed background. Conscious hybridisation enhances hardiness, invites acceptance and the tendency to relativise experiences. These young people openly talk about their experience, because by articulating it they construct their identity. I engaged in talks and conversations with three young African-Caribbean heritage adults in their 20s who identified with mixed ethnicity. Sharon is a successful and promising young musician, Nick is still considering his options for a future career, and Alex is PhD student. They had all lost their grandparents and maintained a perspective upon death, because they had been benefited by the experience and gained motivation and inspiration to focus upon their careers and develop their identities.

Sharon who was close to her white grandmother who raised her, grieved and suffered from her loss, especially because she was left without her protection with her mother who experienced emotional and behavioural problems. Her mixed background enabled her to cross cultural narratives with greater freedom during her bereavement. Sharon grieved in a way that drew resource and inspiration from a narrative of loss that she explored in jazz and soul music. She had inherited her African-Caribbean father's musical talent and although she has very vague memory of him she educated herself into black culture and music, and incorporated the meanings that she discovered into her experience of bereavement for her white grandmother. The latter represents a case of cultural hybridity with empowering potential. Sharon is going from strength to strength in her career as a musician. Music allows her to represent the loving relationship she used to share with her deceased grandmother.

Her roots in soul and jazz inspired by the lives of American black female musicians define her conceptualisation of loss, and give her the opportunity to express her pain in the context of a fulfilling life.

Nick and Alex also embrace death and incorporate the experience in their everyday lives by maintaining continuing bonds with their deceased grandparents whose memory gives them strength and courage to do well in life. Alex being of Jamaican and Irish descent – ethnic categories that identify with traumatic historical experiences in British colonialism, according to another participant (Cynthia) – advocates Buddhist beliefs and adopts a holistic and accepting approach towards life. Mr Thompson's daughter also became Buddhist after being disaffected by what she saw as narrow colonial interpretation of Christianity in her parents' lives and marriage. Mr Thompson unable to comprehend her choice asked himself 'Where did she pick this up?' There is clear tendency among the young to employ hybridisation in order to overcome further life challenges. It is an identity that promises resilience.

Freedom in hybridity opens up opportunities and Buddhism that accepts all experience constitutes a favoured cosmological framework that can be abstracted from cultural and ethnic references to serve purposes of identification with difference. Characteristically, as Beatrice reported more and more African-Caribbean people prefer cremation to burial because it provides them with a liberatory and less definitive potential that represents their hybrid identifications - her daughter is one of them. The success and fulfilment that comes with independent personal identifications transcends structural obstacles and boundaries and asserts the benefits of hybridity embedded in the strength and resilience of being able to exist without stable roots, simply by being creative and inventive in forms of ritualisation.

All young persons of African-Caribbean heritage have the opportunity to utilise their knowledge and experience of diverse cultural frameworks in order to serve their purposes and transcend structural limitations. They have different influences in which poverty and disadvantage play a role but they cross cultural boundaries, a strategy which they use to their benefit when they identify with positive ideals. For this reason, there is community effort to create a positive social legacy represented in successful role models whose stories are published in local and organisational literature (MacDonald, 2001). The role model category is filled by people who achieved in business, science or made an important social contribution. They are paradigmatic figures of morality and ethics and use their skills and ingenuity with humility to serve the common good. Role models gain additional credit and recognition for the reason that they realised their goals (measured by Western standards) despite racism and disadvantage by employing the possibilities that their marginal but hybridised status provides.

In this way, young people are able to identify with ideals that guide them on how to live fully and utilise their identities to their advantage. According to Kitano and Lewis (2005) and Masten, Best and Garmezy, (1990) research has shown that children develop resilience as a response to hardship when they have a positive paradigmatic figure in their lives who loves, supports and counsels them. Cohen has also argued that people born in the diaspora are gifted because of their beneficial position as observers and participants in the societies in which they live. Kitano and Lewis (2005) claimed that gifted children are more resilient. In the Pentecostal Christian community that I visited, I observed that there are cultural structures in place that match adults to children they think that they can identify with and create a bond. They become their godfather or godmother by making a promise to the biological family of the child that should something happens to them they will look after that

child. In the meantime, they spend time with them and place effort upon educating them on morality, ethics, Christianity, relationships and everyday life.

The responsibility to educate the young into the ways in which they can live and survive in environments where they will encounter racism and structural disadvantage is collective, and does not solely concern family units. By living and learning alongside others and observing them, young people of African-Caribbean heritage develop the desire to research their history and genealogy, and in the process they negotiate the impact of historical experience upon their lives and conceptualise patterns and transhistorical relationships. In addition, there are a number of youth projects that negotiate the meaning of history and its impact upon the lives of African-Caribbean heritage youth in Britain. Gloria Gordon (2007) facilitates such a project in London, in which she applied her action research method that promotes bicultural competence. From social experiences African-Caribbean heritage youth learn about loss and suffering and normalise the experience. They become adaptive, defiant and learn ways that overcome the obstacles of structural disadvantage.

Children and young people are not excluded from death rituals but are encouraged to participate and learn their structure, representations and meanings. In this way, through observation and experience they incorporate the concept of loss into their cosmological perspective from instruction and experiences transmitted with love and care that build resilience and useful adaptive strategies that benefit their social lives and enhance their opportunities. Resilience entails an element of caution and self-protection without on the other hand becoming world denying. On the contrary, it teaches young people how to utilise diverse elements in their identities in order to construct their unique life narratives and confidently assert them. Hardiness is an important attitude that they learn to value in the

process, because loss is an experience that they will confront in order to construct hybrid identifications.

Self-enhancement, the second quality of resilience that Bonanno (2004) identified, signals the transformational change that people of African-Caribbean heritage undergo in their attempt to overcome the structural disadvantage that compounds their ability to cope with grief. Inner changes and acquired new meanings are mainly reflected upon career choices in bereaved adults (Kellehear, 2002), as well as, relationship adjustments and a general transformation of conduct and attitudes. This is because loss highlights unsustainable and oppressive circumstances, while it deprives the bereaved of the fear of losing because they have already experienced a very important type of loss, the loss of an individual to death. This is the time of transition that motivates bereaved individuals to implement the changes that they have long wanted to make in their lives. A career change constitutes a profitable way of investing energy because it channels pain to areas that ultimately will benefit the bereaved, and in the case of marginalised African-Caribbean heritage individuals will also improve their social position. Work can be fulfilling, intellectually stimulating, and occupies the bereaved while they are doing something that the deceased would approve of and aids their continuing bonds and communication. In this respect, hard work is grieving and represents an ethical and mature response to bereavement that memorialises the deceased.

Laughter and emotional repression, the third quality of resilience that Bonanno (2004) identified, can also be observed among African-Caribbean people as coping strategies that have been incorporated within established cultural frameworks and interaction codes. Laughter helps maintain reason in uncertain situations, while emotional repression controls and protects the bereaved. Mr Howarth represents a characteristic example of a man who repressed his grief over the loss of his two children to multiple sclerosis. Although he



survived, rationalised the experience and led a fulfilling life, he also suffered lung collapse from which he recovered through surgery. Bonanno (2004) explains that repression sometimes negatively impacts upon health. However, for Mr Howarth his strategy of resilience guaranteed his survival amidst major loss and trauma, it was compatible with his vision and perspective on life, and for this reason, it proved to be very effective on personal level and for the community in which he assumed leadership roles and responsibilities.

In Western societies, women are reported to cope better than men with the loss of a partner and experience less morbidity and mortality (Stroebe, Schut and Stroebe, 2007). Stroebe (2001) theorises that this is because women are more comfortable with expressing their emotions, and within a dual-process model of grief framework (Stroebe and Schut, 1999) they are also better at engaging in both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, while men only relate to the former. However, the African-Caribbean case that includes grief within a cultural framework of loss that everyone identifies with and expresses in the context of everyday interactions promotes resilience and greater wellbeing among men and women alike. Women's experiences are compounded by intensified productive and reproductive labour (Thornton Dill, 1986), while men struggle to positively identify with identifications of hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless, in their majority they are reported to experience better health than white people following loss of a loved one to death (Fitzpatrick and Tran, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

The pain of grief, especially when it refers to the loss of a person with whom the bereaved used to be closely related, has been encapsulated within the psychological theories of grief that aim to return the bereaved to a functional state that serves modern societies (Small, 2001). Psychology with its links to psychotherapeutic practice has focused upon the

individual, usually isolated from their social environment. Such an approach does not suffice when we are examining bereavement experiences among African-Caribbean heritage individuals, who have experienced dispossession and other forms of historical loss and relate to the experience differently. It may have been established that grief is universally experienced (Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson, 1976; Parkes, Laungani and Young, 1997; Irish et al., 1993; Irish, 1997), but unlike communities with stable references, African-Caribbean heritage communities do not undergo psychotherapeutic grief-work in order to transcend the experience. Instead, they engage with a cultural repertoire that negotiates the meaning of loss and demonstrates its life-giving functions and potential.

Engagement with Western notions of grief unfolding in stages, experiencing and letting-go of painful emotions that cause suffering sometimes help African-Caribbean bereaved people in conceptualising a rough framework within which their bereavement will proceed. Continuing bonds and meaning-making processes also constitute tools that they employ in order to adapt to loss. However, it is within a certain counter-culture that these experiences will take place that has its origins in the historical experience of slavery and dispossession in the West and provides a perspective upon loss that promotes acceptance and resilience. Klass (2006) confirms that continuing bonds and related theories need to be contextualised within observations and specific cultural frameworks.

The legacy of loss and culture of grief within African-Caribbean heritage communities inflect experiences compounded by social disadvantage, because where there is a limitation there are safety nets to safeguard and preserve life. In this way, resilience is born out of trauma by adopting an attitude of acceptance reinforced by full awareness and acknowledgement of the social circumstances that cause suffering. People of African-Caribbean heritage construct a life based upon notions of loss and grief because experiences

that induce such feelings connect them to their past, history and ancestry, and build links and identifications that provide meaning and establish continuity in what otherwise seems to be fragmented collective memory. Loss, death and grief in this case serve the purpose of preserving life in a context that questions existence and constructs it meaningless. For this reason, it occupies a central place within the African-Caribbean heritage community's cultural imagination.

Furthermore, death leads to social reorganisation in contexts where it is mostly needed, because repositioning within society reinforces survival. Adaptation is a strategy required in dangerous situations where survival is at stake (Frankl, 2004). For this reason, bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities leads to structural reorganisation and re-identification with experiences and identities that shaped the life of the bereaved and their relationship with the deceased. Severing bonds, continuing bonds and other processes serve this fundamental process, which is informed by the African-Caribbean culture of grief and its heritage.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Bereavement: Experiences of African-Caribbean men in Britain**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will move the discourse a step further by considering the implications of the sociological patterns particular to the African-Caribbean experience in the Western world upon bereavement. In historical perspective, death has been revitalising and empowering within African-Caribbean heritage communities. Nonetheless, it remains a challenge because it requires radical adaptation and social reorganisation in unequal contexts and societies. The way in which people will respond to loss is determined by the mode in which they are differentially affected by the sociological relationships that make up their experience. This is because death and dying are social experiences, and as Howarth (2007: 169) observes ‘a sense of self is constructed in relation to the identity of others’ the death of whom ‘results in the loss of a substantial element of the self’. Identity and its re-working and re-structuring are, therefore, essential elements of bereavement, and the outcome largely depends upon the social organisation of communities, societies and groups of people. Howarth (2007: 15-39) explores the process of meaning-making associated with death and dying and the ways in which it is driven by sociological mechanisms. In this chapter, I take a similar approach towards the study of bereavement and consider the ways in which meaning-making, gender, cultural background, and loss interact in the context of the African-Caribbean heritage diasporic communities to create unique experiences of bereavement that we usually, indiscriminately, and obscurely call ‘cultural’.

In chapter 4 I spent considerable time analysing the social structure of slave societies. The effort aimed to lay out the structure upon which subsequent modes of social organisation

were constructed, in contexts of racial tension in the Western world. The analysis of popular stereotypes and cultural frameworks that shaped social relationships and interactions was equally important to this research because bereavement is directly relevant to interpersonal relationships and social identifications, and sociological analysis benefits by a holistic interpretation of social organisation. Within such an analytical framework, I establish that men of African-Caribbean heritage deal with issues of powerlessness that emanate from identifications with a masculine ideology within an unequal social context when they grieve the loss of a person they are related to. When they identify with ideals of masculinity that due to their socio-economic marginality, they are unable to realise, this is reflected upon family relationships and interactions that determine the complexity and inner conflicts experienced during bereavement.

In chapter 6 I attributed the cultural attitudes of accepting and finding meaning in loss to the existence of alternative value systems among people of African-Caribbean heritage. I argued that these have their origins in experiences of oppression in the Western world. Part of this alternative value system is the organisation of the family and the male provider and protector roles that serves survival purposes in insecure contexts by offering care and support to the community during crises and transitions. Contemporary African-Caribbean experiences have largely diversified and there is greater freedom to assert subjectivity in a postmodern framework, but these basic cultural values structure experience. The male provider and protector roles build upon the patterns constructed by social disadvantage and stereotypes to serve the community. It inflects negative interactions and turns them into strengths for the community as a whole. Within a framework of hegemonic masculinity, these inflections represent two key drivers in men's bereavement experiences. There is considerable diversity within those two parameters, depending upon personal experiences, sexual identifications and social status.

## **Racialised masculinities in bereavement**

In chapter 4 I introduced the idea that bereavement is conditioned by competitive relationships between men and women in contexts of subordination; where inequality and power imposed by violent means – and by referring to violence I include the articulation of racist stereotypes – undermined communication and cooperation and led to the individualistic pursuit of modernist and hegemonic ideals. African-Caribbean people are products of their interactions with white culture which they emulated. However, phenotype (Saldanha, 2006) and difference (Hall, 1996) did not permit assimilation, and since slavery it was imperative for black people to creolise or hybridise culture, and by referring to an African heritage as they progressed into their future in the Western world, to formulate sustainable and life-preserving cultural practices. For this reason, the issues that shape adaptation to loss do not involve concepts that do not exist within Western understandings, but experiences and representations are simultaneously different. In this context, experiences at the intersection of race and gender are crucial to the understanding of bereavement in African-Caribbean heritage communities because they help us to appreciate the uniqueness and peculiarity of African-Caribbean social life without reifying it.

Slavery as a phenomenon that can be located within imperialistic and colonial enterprises was mobilised by an ideology that valued hegemony within a masculine framework. A masculinist ideology that organised society unequally is according to Nurse (2004: 3-4):

*‘...a dominant philosophical value system in the gender framework. It is a totalising philosophy in that it operates with a high level of consensus as a well-constructed myth (Barthes, 1989) and as an instrument of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1980).’*

The sensitive nature of women was considered unsuitable for the harsh environment of slavery where violence and competition between men prevailed (Beckles, 2004). Female slaves were an exception to this rule, and their presence was used to mediate conflicts and boost male egos. Nurse (2004: 13) contends that ‘most men are not as powerful as they are made out to be’ but the problem is that they are socialised to see masculinity as an ‘entitlement’, if not ‘endowment’, and despite differences and inequalities in status and power they become ‘complicit in patriarchy or tied together through the oppression of women’. In the context of slave societies where slave men were ‘kept’ and ‘kept down’ by armed white men (Beckles, 2004) that oppressed them, their antagonism and competition over realisation of masculinity often centred around sexual relationships with slave women. Social organisation placed the latter in positions of vulnerability in that they carried the burden of responsibility where identifications remained unrealised.

White male masters were at the apex of the pyramid of slave societies’ social hierarchy. They became exemplary figures, worshiped and revered, that instilled in black slaves the desire to ‘catch up’ and ‘follow the leader’ (Nurse, 2004). However, confrontations over exploitation and dehumanisation were resolved by violent means. According to Beckles (2004) violence subjugated black men, while it asserted their desire to resist oppression. Slave women were not seen as conducive to black males’ emancipation when they were used to satisfy white men’s sexual desires, abused and violently racialised (Walvin, 2001). Competition over sexual partners between black and white men in a context of racial and material inequality was for Patterson (1982) the reason for which violence and matrifocal households became key within family organisation in the black Western diaspora. The latter meant that women who bore children and had vested interest in promoting family cohesion experienced intensified reproductive labour (Thornton Dill, 1986). Their marginal status

within a competitive patriarchal system forced them to be flexible and inventive in finding ways to secure wellbeing and survival for their families, kin and communities - a purpose to which stable relationships were important, but not always realistic.

The pattern of considering women responsible for men's lack of realisation is observed again later in history, in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Parry (2004) reports that women are considered responsible for men's poor record of achievement because they demonstrate sexual preference for older men who can provide for them. However, she found that it is the culture of socialising men into a notion of masculinity that promotes a 'macho' ideal and rejects intellectual qualification as success, which is responsible for low educational attainment among men. Women's preferences can then be explained by the inability of their peers to inspire them. Contemporary Britain represents an arena within which hard-working and motivated African-Caribbean women feel liberated from the constraints of patriarchy, and are free to pursue their ambitions. Their representation in higher education and employment is higher than in any other ethnic group (Modood, 1993). Men's representation in Higher Education is low but on the rise (Modood et al, 1997). This indicates acknowledgement of the issues and effort to take advantage of opportunities available in advanced capitalist societies.

Relationship tensions and conflicts as by-products of historical structural inequalities become problematic when women are subject to men's actualisation. The pattern was evident in the bereavement experience of one senior participant who had been socialised in the gendered and racialised framework of colonial societies in the Caribbean. A shift in race discourse from biology to culture exacerbated competition among black people because it undermined their solidarity and causes that united them, and located their goals and desires within the possibility of participation in white society on equal terms. The process and



methods of their renewed but continuing subordination through the colonial myths and stereotypes perpetuated feelings of inadequacy and inferiority and historical ways of relating and interacting. For this reason, men in colonial Caribbean experienced the insecurities that Nurse (2004: 13-14) describes:

*'[Males] who experience their masculinity in contradictory terms, live in constant fear of being perceived as effeminate by other men and particularly by women. The fear of being unmasked may be viewed as the basis for homophobia, the backlash against feminism, male-on-male violence, and domestic violence against women.'*

Mr Thompson was born in Barbados out of 'wedlock' and witnessed his mother working very hard, trying to do the right thing for her church community, being emotionally and physically abused by her long-term partner and eventually breaking down and dying at a young age. Although he was held his stepfather responsible and communicated his sentiments in revengeful acts such as by ripped apart his clothes and destroying his possessions, Mr Thompson was looked after well by his grandmother, and other women in his family environment. Yet, his relationship to the woman that he married was challenging. He was able to access a hegemonic ideal of masculinity by entering social higher social ranks of a racialised colonial structure. His grandmother who worked as a maid to a household of wealthy and well-networked African-Caribbean people arranged his marriage with one of the family's daughters. Their connections and links guaranteed Mr Thompson a position within the Royal Air Force (RAF) even though he did not qualify on health grounds and did not pass the health test.

Once into the RAF Mr Thompson wanted to maintain prospects of upward social mobility and could not afford a return to his earlier racialised status. He never acknowledged

institutional racism in the RAF and adapted his behaviour to construct race irrelevant in his life. He pursued individualistic ideals and took credit for his success without referring to the process by which he got there through his partner's and her family's connections. When the permanence of his position in the RAF seemed insecure, he held his partner responsible for his inability to realise his aspirations of hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, his experience did not corroborate his partner's impression of it who grew progressively alienated due to his frequent postings because of which the family experienced constant dislocation and their daughter had to change schools regularly. As a result, the marriage ended in divorce.

The disturbance was long-lasting because Mr Thompson and his wife continued seeing each other after the divorce. Her health deteriorated, and she died from diabetes at the age of 67, almost a decade prior to my interview with Mr Thompson. Their daughter felt distraught by their parents' relationship and led a solitary life. Her mother's loss was devastating to her and preferred to keep distance from her father in his old age. Mr Thompson following his wife's death struggled with loneliness and social isolation. Realisation of his own role in his life's events was a gradual process as his physical ability declined and he had to rely upon community volunteers for help and support. Initially, sensitised by the loss of his former wife and her health problems and suffering, he reassessed her role and acknowledged her contribution to his social advancement. Although Mr Thompson during his bereavement rewrote the narrative of the life, he had shared with her, he still employed an individualistic perspective to interpret their experience. A year later, following struggles with money and accommodation compounded by increasing health problems, he had come to almost full awareness of his responsibility in the situation and was anxious about whether God would forgive him and bring his suffering to an end, preferably before his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

A central process in the bereavement experiences of African-Caribbean men is the reconsideration and review of the life they shared with the deceased. This is because identifications with a hegemonic masculine framework created considerable problems in relationships and interactions, and bereavement requires revision of the past to settle differences and find meaning in the present. Gillies and Neymeyer (2006) theorise that distress provides the incentive to reflection and mobilises meaning-making processes such as sense making, benefit finding and identity change, followed by changes in the lifestyle and activities with which bereaved people engage. Frankl (2004) also argued in the description of his logotherapy method that the quest for new meaning is mobilised by the need to change aspects of an individual's lived reality. However, the extent to which structural change is possible depends upon the bereaved person's social life and position, as well as the stage of their lives and age.

Mr Thompson's distress was caused by the way he had related to his former wife during their married life and beyond, rather than her loss to death. They were not living together when she died so he did not grieve her absence. His individualistic attitude had severed any family bonds that could have been supportive in old age by providing meaning, care and companionship. Within the African-Caribbean community he preoccupied himself for a while and found meaning in taking part in group activities. Unlike other men who played dominoes, he was particularly good company to women and engaged in craftwork and heritage production. In this way, he managed to maintain a positive outlook on life although he was concerned about his lack of appreciation for his deceased former wife and kept referring back to it. When his health deteriorated a certain sense of loss and incompleteness could not be compensated for.

Although Gillies and Neymeyer (2006) found that bereaved people engage in new activities as a reflection of their newly acquired meanings, senior citizens do not have much opportunity to transform their lives radically and structurally. For them bereavement addresses ethical issues and meaning-making constitutes a holistic evaluation of life, and they need to rely upon perspective and imagination in order to experience a new reality. This materialises in the context of the 'life review' (Butler, 1963), common among people nearing the end-of-life. Mr Thompson's growth was considerable and led to the maturation of his life narrative. However, his behavioural patterns during life and delayed self-reflection meant that he did not have opportunities to find happiness in changed relationships and new social roles. He, therefore, invested his hopes in dying having been forgiven by God. Having learned to love, respect and nurture, and having made amends with God death could be an opportunity for a new life for him, according to his cultural, African-Caribbean understanding of the experience of death affirmed and communicated by religious Christian instruction that Mr Thompson advocated. He found our regular conversations enabling in that they facilitated his ongoing life review. At the end he stated that he would never be able to have this conversation with anybody else. He was visibly relieved and awake but also comfortable.

### **The male provider and protector in bereavement**

The ideology of hegemonic masculinity drives identifications for African-Caribbean men but the same ideal can be satisfied more effectively by adopting the role of the provider and protector of family and kin, because it serves survival purposes - a function of vital importance to a marginalised and threatened community. This is a creole identification, born in slavery and maintained in unequal colonial and postcolonial contexts. Gordon (1997), for example, is critical of cultural reductionism and the interpretation of the black experience of

masculinity in terms of ‘cultural deficiency’ (see *Aldous; Banfield; Bernard; Lewis; Moynihan; Rianwater, Baca Zinn in Gordon, 1997: 36*), claiming that family organisation in the black experience is diverse. He reports evidence of ‘respectability’ as a cultural value that organises gender relationships in the context of African-American society. Men will provide and protect their families and may even maintain a second family to care for. Sometimes, their assistance extends to the whole community. This is a trend that shapes some relationships within the Western world black diaspora. In this context, experiences of hardship that cause suffering, such as bereavement, involve less painful transitions because meanings require less radical redefinition in the context of supportive networks, extended family and kin communities that carry historical legacy and ancestral memory to satisfy existential concerns in precarious circumstances.

Mr Howarth fulfils Gordon’s (1997) criteria of ‘respectability’ in that he was a caring husband, father, kin, as well as a successful entrepreneur, and community leader. He disproportionately experienced grief, misfortune and pain in his life but was driven to survival by his role and ability to nurture, care and benefit himself and others. Early on in his adult life he refused to settle down and explained that he wanted to marry the right person. It is probably true that there were things that he did not like in relationships and desired maturity and stability. However, identifications are necessarily relational and subject to negotiation. The adoption of the provider and protector role is responsive to hegemonic notions of masculinity in circumstances of constraint and disadvantage (Gordon, 1997). When Mr Howarth assumed provider and protector roles, he simultaneously fulfilled hegemonic masculinity ideals, and the process leading up to this point was important in his learning. Education and the presentation of employment opportunities required acceptance and compromise values with which the wider African-Caribbean community identify and appreciate.

African-Caribbean women of senior age accept this counter-hegemonic definition of masculinity and positively respond to it. In an open conversation between Mr Howarth and two female community members on the issue of loyalty, the two women described themselves as 'not the jealous type' and expressed the sentiment that they do not want to be worrying about what men do. For this reason, 'they [men] can do whatever they want'. African-Caribbean women value respectability in men because it promotes material wellbeing and survival in adversity. In a precarious and insecure experience 'humility' is a quality which is ethically superior to 'loyalty' to a single partner.

Whitehead (1978) demonstrates that in the West Indies residential, kinship and mating patterns represent survival and adaptive responses to economic marginality. Specifically, some men may have two families and provide for both of them. Living arrangements also reflect social organisation modelled to cope with material disadvantage where people live in extended kinship networks rather than their own nuclear families and fluctuate in size according to their means and needs. In contemporary Britain, increasing material prosperity and life in a society where the welfare system supports nuclear family organisation, has transformed attitudes yet again. However, past heritage and continuing patterns of poverty and disadvantage perpetuate alternative modes of family organisation (Berthood, 2000). Relevance and association of counter-identifications with masculinity with loss affirm its value and importance.

The advantages of a distinct African-Caribbean way of realising variants of masculinity responsive to conditions of material hardship lie in that it ensures safety and support during challenges and transitions. Mr Howarth experienced major loss of two children and his sister in a single year, but in his bereavement he fared better than Mr Thompson both in terms of

family and community support, and ability to recreate meaning. His son and daughter died to multiple sclerosis at the young age of 42 and 39 respectively. His son had fought with the illness for 10 years and died at a local hospice under the daily care of Mr and Mrs Howarth and hospice staff. His daughter was ill for 5 years and lived in the USA with her husband and two children. Mr and Mrs Howarth visited them several times. They also went to Russia and offered themselves to research, but no hereditary hypothesis could be established. Their cooperation and involvement in Western scientific research were a positive experience within their bereavement process because it strengthened their relationship with the wider society and reinforced their identifications with a broader transnational category of which they are part. However, they mostly experienced their bereavement within their community and African-Caribbean culture. The couple have a common practical approach to dealing with loss and upheaval. They did everything they could to save their children and accepted what that they could not change.

Mr Howarth has been a community leader and his wife assisted him in his efforts to organise it. Their participation was ongoing, and they lived their lives in public within an extended network of kin. When they lost their children, it was very important for them to find a way to conceptualise their loss to communicate it to others within the network they shared and trusted. The couple treated the community with significance and gave it priority because it provides meaning to lives ordinarily socially excluded and racialised within the broader society. This is despite enjoying relative success and privilege within a wider framework through employment opportunities. Amongst family and kin, they were able to maintain an ethical stance that guaranteed reciprocity, community support, meaning and respectability.

Engagement with the African-Caribbean heritage community benefited Mr Howarth because it represented and expressed his perspectives on life and loss, provided a support network,

as well as an audience to discursively construct meaning, while offering opportunities for identification. In this context, his loss was incorporated into the community's narrative in order to adapt to the painful experiences that he persevered. Constructing post-loss identity in this way has the benefit of making known to the world that loss is part of the experience of the individual so that they know how to relate to them and consider their personal needs. Unlike Mr Thompson who partly constructed his narrative during our encounter, Mr Howarth maintained a coherent story that he simply communicated to me as part of the process of storytelling and reality production. His narrative is on-going, regularly and systematically elaborated in everyday interactions and through the study of records, archives and memorabilia like certificates, photographs and letters that he keeps reminding himself of his children. By constructing meaning that can be verbalised and communicated to a group, the bereaved survives and lives on with the loss. In this way, continuing bonds with the deceased were established in conversations with others (Walter, 1996).

Gillies and Neymeyer (2006) in their model of meaning reconstruction refer to important changes that take place in the identity of the bereaved that reflect upon what they do in life and the activities they engage with, especially when the death does not comply with their previous meaning-making framework that now needs major reconstruction. For senior citizens for whom opportunities to start anew in life are limited, it is important to be able to maintain a coherent story and incorporate the experience of loss to death in it. Identification with the culture of grief promotes acceptance, which guarantees cooperative relationships and linearity of existence and experience. Mr Howarth invested his efforts into the construction of an identity the realisation of which involved others and promoted collective wellbeing within a family, kin and community framework. This is a context in which in old age he was able to defend a coherent story that everyone recognised and identified with. Mr Howarth pursued social cohesion in the continuity of past and present community and



produced a legacy that could be evidenced. When he experienced loss that could potentially shake his existential security and cause major distress, he adapted with ease and did not lose meaning. His family and extended kinship network contextually embed his newly acquired meanings and incorporate them into existing and evolving narratives of loss.

Mr Howarth's response to loss can be puzzling to those who employ exclusively modernist cultural understanding and cannot comprehend how one may be able to acquire meaning in suffering (Frankl, 2004). The community offered Mr Howarth an arena in which he created a positive social legacy by turning experiences of loss into benefits for all. In this space, his children's deaths could be incorporated, honoured and memorialised. Mr Howarth gave himself permission to continue living after his children's loss in a context that cultivated the culture of grief that renewed the African-Caribbean community. He found purpose and motivation in building a positive social legacy that promotes social cohesion. For this reason, he immersed himself in archiving, sorting and categorising material culture. Frankl (2004) argues that experiencing and expressing love to others and doing good deeds, as well as, working for a cause are meaning-making strategies of survival. At the age of 85, Mr Howarth preferred to take a back seat and enjoy the respect and recognition of having created something helpful and worthwhile. He was willingly and slowly disengaging from social life, but also had the choice to stay, observe and consult for as long as he could and wanted.

Mr Howarth was ready to be incorporated into a family of dead ancestors. He had contributed an important social legacy to his African-Caribbean community, which enabled him to unproblematically carry out his end-of-life review (Butler, 1963). Bereavement for Mr Howarth did not involve major social reorganisation because it confirmed and elaborated his narratives, and served purposes of meaning-making in the presence of a community sustained by loss. The modes of deaths – incurable illness - reinforced the sentiment about

the ephemerality and inevitability of life as it comes, that can only be accepted. For this reason, it is important to be able to maintain meaningful narratives about the past that cannot be undone.

*'Usually, to be sure, man considers only the stubble field of transitoriness and overlooks the full granaries of the past, wherein he had salvaged once and for all his deeds, his joys and also his sufferings. Nothing can be undone and nothing can be done away with. I should say having been is the surest kind of being.'*

(Frankl, 2004: 124)

When a bereaved person has a way, a method of capturing the past and making it meaningful, the meaninglessness of life's ephemerality - which is what death is about - is constructed as irrelevant. This is what makes continuing bonds so powerful and conducive to survival after loss; they utilise the past to construct meaning. Mr Howarth provides evidence that bereavement is more directly related to the bereaved person's relationship to social structure and the way in which it translates into action in interactions and interpersonal relationships that reflect cultural attitudes and understandings, than to the severity of the loss itself.

### **British-born African-Caribbean men in bereavement**

Although fundamental relationship patterns and historically reproduced social structures undercut the experience of the first generation born to African-Caribbean migrants in Britain, there are simultaneously radical differences. I explained in chapter 5 that African-Caribbean migrants were perceived as conformists and suitable for manual work, while their children socialised and 'humanised' in Britain were rebellious and rejected subordinate roles (Phillips

and Phillips, 1998). Confrontation with wider society about processes of racialization and social exclusion and within their family with their parents shaped their experiences of bereavement. Their meaning-making processes were mobilised by the incompatibility of the loss within interpretative frameworks and assumptions about justice and order, and their adaptation through acceptance, trust and inevitable change of lifestyle.

In this research my drive has been to represent the multiplicity of African-Caribbean experience, and for this reason, I did not look for participants that would confirm each other's perspectives. This is purposeful to guide further research more effectively; since knowledge on the topic is still at its infancy and information is limited and scattered. However, there is indication that gender identifications that shaped the experiences of senior participants persisted in contexts of structural inequality.

For example, a theatre production titled *Looking for Obama* by Jenny Davis and the Carib Theatre Company, played at Bristol's Old Vic in October 2009, presented three generations of 'typical' African-Caribbean men and a woman having monologues about their perspectives on life and how the influential figure of Obama impacted upon it and encouraged transformation through positive identifications. The middle-aged British-born African-Caribbean man was anxious to realise success and get promoted at work. However, he encountered obstacles to his upward mobility, discrimination, and stereotyping. He felt disempowered and affirmed his masculinity in an affair. In the play he is struggling with his conscience when he comes face-to-face with Obama's paradigmatic example. His religious background reinforced his fears. Eventually, he resolves his inner conflict by making a resolution to stop worrying and return to his family. The interaction does not involve bereavement but demonstrates the inner transformation that African-Caribbean men undergo when they negotiate their identifications. However, it is mortality that they consider when

they engage in self-reflective exercises and decide to change. This is in order to protect themselves and their loved ones from the disruption caused by the experience. The same issues that this man encountered during the monologue would challenge him during bereavement as senior members of the community participants in this research highlighted. The same motif of negotiations with a precarious masculinity defined his experiences, despite his socialisation in Britain.

The value of the male provider and protector can be traced within socialisation processes. An informant told me that African-Caribbean men are taught by their mothers to assist in housekeeping. This is how they learn the principle of giving to their families and become aware that in hardship they need to share resources and efforts. I had the opportunity to observe active engagement with these principles at a Sunday family gathering I was invited to. The two men who were present helped in serving the food and washed the dishes while women rested after lunch which they had cooked. They were very polite and caring towards others. This is a traditional male role that serves social reproduction purposes within African-Caribbean heritage communities. The value of the male provider has been enhanced by improved gender relationships and greater equality between the sexes. Although some problems persist, the main obstacle for the middle-aged British-born African-Caribbean generation has been their long-term racialization and social exclusion, rather than contradictory patterns of family organisation against which they measure.

### ***John***

John, aged 50, felt disempowered because he was stereotypically identified with a street crime and deviance by the larger society and his mother while his educational needs were neglected, and opportunities withheld. This is something that encouraged him to reinforce what was thought of him and look for meaning in deviant subcultures, because it was the

only way in which he could gain recognition and a sense of worth within a community of people who shared the same social status. Being intimidated by society he preferred to be feared by outsiders whom he perceived as a threat. Essentially, it was a protective towards the vulnerable self, strategy of self-preservation and survival. At an interpersonal level his confrontations centred upon his relationship with his mother but essentially, she was the manifestation of societal stereotypes and conflicts that traumatised John. For this reason, she occupies a central place within his narratives of loss.

John's mother criticised him that he was not 'good enough' and proclaimed that he would never 'turn into nothing good' in his life, while society stereotyped him as 'underachiever' at school. Their diverse approaches to racism, poverty and marginalisation led to breakdown in relationships that affected their life experiences and cost substantial loss to the family. For John's mother the ideal son would become a doctor or university educated professional. For John this was a hypocritical stereotype that did not reconcile his experience. He left home at 16 to enter a career in crime and gangs. Our conversation focused upon his experiences of loss and transformation rather than his early adult life, but he referred me to a book by Pryce (1986) that provides ethnographic detail about the insider meanings of people that John was personally acquainted with.

John is not ashamed of who he was, but he is regretful about certain things that happened that involved major loss, and for this reason, he moved away to save himself and others. He is aware of the reasons that he could not have done things differently in a racist society but resents his mother for not having helped him. He perceived her behaviour as abusive, and their confrontations became habitual and systematic. She would consistently try to diminish his value and worth in order to force change in him, but she only succeeded in pushing him further away. One day upon a visit to his parental home they rehearsed their differences in a

context of an argument. John reminded her of a time when she put him down because somebody stole a piece of jewellery from him. He was wearing an expensive gold chain around his neck and showing it to her he said:

*'Do you see this now mum? No one will dare to take it from me.'*

Her remarks touched John's insecurities about his identity that was being questioned and rejected by society.

*'If you are a black male, if you are not university or doctorate educated you are stereotyped.'*

For this reason, he describes his mother as 'evil' and 'wicked' and believes that some parents are very 'hurtful' towards their children. Many years later John was still angry and divided when reflecting upon his mother's influence upon his life and self-perception. The confrontational relationship was revived by her death as he adapted to her loss. John changed his life in his 30s, while the intensity and complexity of the problems experienced meant that the transformation was gradual. For this reason, he projects her attitude towards him into the present and imagines her saying 'you should had done this or that when you were younger' when he criticises himself. This leads to lack of self-esteem, self-loathing, and tension in his relationships with other people. The childhood memories and trauma resurfaced when she died and excluded him from her will by giving everything to her daughter with whom, according to John, she had been conspiring with against him and his father.

*'One of the wickedest things in death is the will. When that comes that's what gonna let you know what your mum or dad thought about you.'*

The will symbolically communicated the mother's continuing disapproval and lack recognition of John's worth and value. Continuing financial instability strengthened the accusations. John's subsequent life and relationships, personal and social, have been unstable. He also has a daughter the character and qualities of whom he does not condone.

Although John is still trying to find meaning because his relationship to his mother does not make sense to him, he has transformed his life by embracing the ideal of respectability vested in a Christian ethic of a black man who is knowledgeable in the historical experience of his community and can help others by example and leadership. This is evident in his desire to study theology and write about his experience in an autobiography. However, it was the inevitability of change brought about by a disruptive experience of loss that reinforced the incompatibility between past and present frameworks and demanded radical reassessment of perspectives and way of life.

The transformational effects of death are highlighted in John's experience because through bereavement he changed a lifestyle that would potentially lead to premature death. In this way, he deconstructed inner conflicts - a process that led to growth. John's younger brother died in a tragic car accident at the age of 18, a year after he had been severely beaten and incapacitated by a gang in search for somebody. John who was 29 at the time felt responsible for his brother's death although he was not involved in the incident. He was the older brother who was supposed to protect his younger sibling who admired him and identified with him. His conscience encouraged a journey through past memories of a life that he shared with the deceased.

*'Bereavement is a big test in time. When my brother died it took me right back into my childhood. For one week I could imagine things that I could remember from when I was a child right up to the day he was buried. Everyday I had a flashback. Everyday. Memories. Things I couldn't remember came back to my mind. Like a dream.'*

John's parents sent him to Jamaica for a holiday to help him get through the initial 'risky time' when he felt a strong urge to kill the people who assaulted his brother.

*'Going on holiday when somebody dies is a very good thing.'*

However, his grief lasted for years and he only managed to let his anger go when there was some sort of 'retribution' and worldly 'justice', when the people who assaulted his brother paid for the damage they inflicted upon him by turning against each other. One of them died and the other ended up in jail.

*'When you have a death in your family it is a hard thing to deal with, yeah? And some people look to see how they can get some sort of release from it. My bereavement went on for years with bitterness and anger. Do you understand? And what really made me see that things work out is when I have seen it all turn back on them. So that gave me that release. Release of all the bitterness.'*

John's obstacle to adaptation to loss and personal realisation was his difficulty to accept and understand injustice. His relationship to his mother, social exclusion and his brother's loss did not comply with his perception of orderliness and fairness in the world. His experiences were violent mobilised by the hatred that drives racialised relationships. However, he found meaning by investing trust in a Christian ethic that promised and delivered justice in ways



not governed by human law. John had the option to explore theology and teach others in the same way that black religious leaders promoted justice and emancipation throughout history. This was an empowering possibility that compensates for his lifelong experience of disempowerment and suffering. This is what John's experience of bereavement taught him, and this is the direction it took while it reinforced growth and social restructuring. In his late 30s he joined a convent for a year after being approached by a Christian missionary who was working upon the salvation of black youth in disadvantaged areas in London. When he re-entered society he approached Pentecostal Christian communities that accepted him and aided his rehabilitation process while he tried to gain independence.

John's struggle to adapt to life after experiencing loss and bereavement and his search for meaning in an unjust social world, followed by his newly acquired purpose through identification with spirituality, confirm Frankl's (2004: 105) argument that the 'man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives'. Brown (2008) in relation to death in slave societies explains that loss revitalises life because it potentially gives meaning to a meaningless existence through the articulation of narratives and beliefs in a higher purpose. John's experience highlights why since slavery charismatic male figures promoted emancipation through the performance of spiritual inquests that ascribed higher purpose to experiences of oppression. This encouraged respect and recognition in others and attracted a following of people who identified with the cause. The meanings that they encouraged in others were conducive to survival despite violence and dehumanisation because resistance was a longer-term process realised only where some form of normality could be maintained, however this would look like under enslavement and oppression.

Meaning-making in the awareness that there is orderliness, love and purpose even when peoples' freedoms are being violated and denied gave John access to an African-Caribbean cultural repertoire that he could utilise to facilitate grief and transcend it. For example, he reported an experience at his brother's funeral that reminds us of the slave death inquests (Brown, 2008), which policed relationships within the community by administering justice to any wrongdoings committed against the deceased. While carrying his brother's coffin to the cemetery with the help of other men, he felt that it was getting progressively heavier. He perceived the experience as an indication that the soul of the deceased was restless, in need of redemption and retribution. At the same time, he understood that death is part of life and the burden of it that he had to accept.

*'We all have to die. Haven't we? That's what makes me understand. That we all have to die.'*

Despite trauma and the complexity of the issues involved in John's life, he managed to maintain a degree of equilibrium in his bereavement and realised that what actually helped him most was the intervention of time that distanced him from the death, while he kept himself busy in beneficial endeavours. In this way, he learned patience and acceptance.

*'You know what helps me most? Getting on with life.'*

At the time of the interview, John was still trying to assume an active and life-affirming social life. It was the power of death that facilitated his growth and development and distance from a life which was not sustainable and would potentially lead to premature death. His bereavement following his brother's death necessitated radical change of lifestyle, while his

mother's death many years later required the resolution of issues that still prevented the realisation of his identifications.

At the time of death and motivated by the transition of bereavement men evaluate their masculinity because the extent to which they suffered provides a measure for it. Death indicates to bereaved African-Caribbean men the extent to which their masculinity serves their existential frameworks because the circumstances that surround it reveal related issues. Change of lifestyle or engagement with different activities may provide resolution because such changes require the adoption of alternative ways of relating to other people. In this way, respect towards the self and the deceased with whom the relationship has been strenuous is established and ensures that the same pattern will not be repeated by the bereaved person. At a societal level the pattern will persist but the bereaved mastered the skill of responding to the demands of his social position. In this way, he transcends death, loss and social disadvantage. This process is conducive to social change. John and his mother probably never managed to reach reconciliation, but their interaction promoted growth only possible through conflict in contexts of racialisation and oppression.

## **Fred**

Where sexual difference implicates and inflects relationships, gender patterns persist and affect meaning-making processes among African-Caribbean men. Fred was rejected by his African-Caribbean family and community because of his sexual identification. As a non-hetero-normative man, Fred still identified with the ideal of respectability (Gordon, 1997). His grief and bereavement over his grandmother's death provided an opportunity to reflect upon relationships and interactions complicated by social perceptions of gender and sexuality in racialised contexts, appreciate his unique qualities and help others by sharing the lessons learned from his experience.

In the literature, precarious masculinities have been constructed as violent towards women and intolerant towards sexual difference and non hetero-normativity (Nurse, 2004). Fred was surprised to realise that African-Caribbean culture excludes sexual difference despite its understanding of what it means to occupy a marginal social space. For this reason, he abruptly lost his family and community when he 'came out' at the age of 16 and got 'chucked out' of the house. From the age of 15 he started negotiating his identity. He also considered his options within an oppressive environment with limited possibilities of existing for a non-hetero-normative black person. He was interested in safeguarding ethical values such as freedom and choice, as well as wellbeing from everyone even if this meant that some people would be disappointed because they would not understand his subjectivity. The experience was traumatic and fearful to Fred who tried to resolve a complex situation that he barely understood in a mature way. His first step was to secure an income and a job and when it was time, he 'came out' - before the news would reach his parents from third parties.

The first two years of living alone felt like 'living in the wilderness' but he made 'a new family of sorts' consisted of predominantly white gay men. He found a partner with whom he cohabited with the financial assistance of an organisation that looked after gay men and women. Emotionally the experience was a 'journey through a tunnel' because he had to keep going in the darkness, in directions he was unfamiliar with, and places where he was required to make crucial decisions and use his judgement. He was called to explore a whole new world because the possibility of turning back to what was familiar to him was taken away.

*'At first you don't see any light at all. Then you go round the corner and realise that there was no hope there. And keep turning round all these corners hoping that one day you will see light. And at each point you take time out. Stopping and reflecting.'*

*You have just come back from that direction you can't go back there because you will hurt yourself again. You have got to go forward. Eventually, you see just a glimpse. And you know that going back is not good for you. You follow the light. Each time you are heading towards the light things are getting better and better.'*

Fred was left without parental guidance at a still very young age to manage a situation that required maturity and control. He learned through trial and error and made his choices by considering all the possible options and scenarios and running through his mind what could be worse. This logical strategy proved effective because it allowed him to reinvent his life and to explore his identity and difference. Fred later went to university as a mature student to study health science. Since then, he has worked in organisations that promote health and wellbeing in gay communities. His latest job is a little bit different. He works as equalities officer liaising with various policy-making bodies and consulting them upon the issue of difference, social exclusion, and marginality. He has also had long-term relationships in his life.

After two years of having left home Fred revived his lost connection to his parents, and in time they learned to relate to each other with acceptance. Fred mastered the skill of managing his relationships by calculating outcomes and interactions. He applied the same principle to his encounters with his parents. Despite prejudice and social disadvantage being present in the experience of both parties, Fred's negotiations of his sexual identity equipped him with a higher level of insight that helped him to accurately observe and evaluate the social dimensions implicated in any given situation. However, the settlement of affairs with his parents did not alleviate his sense of loss and grief. It would be more accurate to say that he hardened and learned to manage and detach himself from judgemental and condescending behaviour in others. Characteristically, he reported that had his grandmother who he only

met in his adult life rejected him for who he was, he would treat the encounter as just another usual incident of bigotry and dismiss it without a second thought. However, Fred's meeting with his Carib-Indian grandmother at the place of his parents' birth in St. Vincent in 1995 changed his perspective and granted entry to a whole new experience. It was the first time that a family member accepted him, expressed love openly and told him that homosexuality is normal. Fred felt protected and able to relax in the presence of a family member. He was able to go through his past experiences and visualise that he was being guarded and protected by his grandmother when others insulted him. In this way, he experienced the liberating feeling of being loved and cared for.

Fred went back to St. Vincent for more in 2005 and 2008. His grandmother died in 2011 at the age of 93. Fred considers his grandmother's death as the biggest loss he has experienced, although he includes the loss of family and community into the category employing a wider definition of the experience.

*'There is real grief especially when you have lost something that is really safe. Something like the community. Loss comes into so many shapes and forms: like the loss of opportunity to go to university. Luckily I went later on in life.'*

The 'loss of real opportunities to connect with his siblings' or 'find a bit more about his community' because he had to move away to avoid being 'shunned' left limited opportunities for reconnection and further exploration of his cultural heritage. Meaning-making in the context of family and kin relationships was limited to a rationalisation process. Its intensity and demands invited a hard-work ethic that led to considerable personal development but contained emotional fulfilment in honest relationships. In contrast, the positive relationship to his grandmother caused grief because he found hard to perceive

fairness and orderliness in a world where the only person that loved him entered his life late only to depart not long afterwards. However, through reflection upon his grandmother's life and death, Fred realised that he could just be himself and lead a meaningful life with nothing to hide. In fact, his life and example were to be shared and communicated with others.

The quality of one's relationship to the deceased plays a role in bereavement because although both positive and negative relationships lead to growth, the former inspire and provide the opportunity to embody the loss and creatively reconstruct social life. With his grandmother's love and loss, Fred felt let down by life, but at the same time, entitled to claim his right to be in the world and defy stereotypes and prejudices by stating that 'it does not have to be that hard in life'. He relinquished identifications with negative past relationships and asserted his subjective experience with confidence and in a way that serves the community. His job as equalities officer allows him to assume role model responsibilities as it involves consulting and advising others on difference. His personal experience and subjectivity contextualise the lessons and teachings he communicates, aiding understanding. Fred extended this experience to public speaking in the form of a personal narrative aiming to educate others about the implications and subjective experience of 'coming out' and facing discrimination and social exclusion. In this role, he does not have to manage his conduct because it requires him to be authentic and honest. It is a role that he enjoys and finds fulfilling and considers his grandmother part of what he does because she was equally connected to a soulful level. At the same time, he is tackling issues of equality, diversity and inclusion denied to him in his early adult life. With confidence and maturity, he now shares his insight with others.

Fred's post-loss transformation involved the undertaking of new activities outside the boundaries of his African-Caribbean community of St. Vincentians. This is because

throughout his life, his social exclusion and isolation forced him to look for meaning and opportunities in diverse contexts that articulate multiple discourses without exclusively identifying with a single source. His sexual identity and difference required him to find realisation of his aspirations within white gay communities, and the wider society. He understands the hierarchical nature of stereotypes and discrimination because within the gay community he was racialised and treated as different, to his surprise – he hoped that people who are being ‘chastised’ by society would not be prejudiced.

The opportunity to be versatile and selectively employ diverse perspectives to interpret experience and act in the world is empowering because it permits adaptation to contextual circumstances and offers the freedom to move around, be flexible and transform. His alternative insight also granted him with access to middle class opportunities and with-it options of memorialisation that exercise creativity. His Caribbean heritage communicated to him by his Carib-Indian grandmother provided him with the cultural capital needed to realise his complex, hybrid and post-modern identifications. Within his family there is European, African and native Indian descent that added to the complexity of Fred’s perspective. His family and the social structures and relationships that shaped his bereavement experience have African-Caribbean origins, but his difference and social complexity that led to his exclusion equally provided unique opportunities that come with greater freedom and lack of stable references. Bonds, relationships, and identifications sustain his identity, but they are not definitive. On this basis, Fred takes the opportunity to explore new options. Bereavement and grief are conducive to this socially transformative process, which he exercises with compassion and humility.



## **Conclusion**

African-Caribbean men inspired by a Western and modernist ideology aspire to be remembered after death by leaving behind a positive social legacy, having helped others and/or provided for them. Social disadvantage means that community relationships are imperative in enabling the individual to create sustainable relationships. It operates as a safety and support network from where people embark in search of opportunities that will increase welfare, wellbeing, and social cohesion. And it is to the community or family of sorts in which they have invested where they will return in times of need. In the process, they share resources, and support each other to overcome social disadvantage. Those who pursue their masculinity within individualistic frameworks and reject the community risk being left socially excluded, because they actively dismantle protective relationships and networks. This is not a generalisation because there is upward mobility (Modood et al., 1997) and diversity of experience, but the pattern largely stands. Even Fred who could potentially assume independence valued family and community which he had to recreate in imaginative ways.

There is the parallel sentiment that one needs to move beyond the community in order to realise their independence. However, I interpret this not literally as the transcendence of the community, but metaphorically, as the evolution and development of hybridity through exposure to outside and often contradictory influences. Hybridity is an identity that equips individuals and groups with resilience and is flexible enough to adapt to any circumstances. The community remains central in the imagination of African-Caribbean people and serves the purpose of reminding them of their culture, history and issues that shape their experience and inform their hybrid identifications. Rollock et al (2012) demonstrate the ambivalence that black middle classes experience about their class identity. Some continue to identify with a working-class background remaining bound by traditional community identifications.

Most of their participants admitted that there is not straightforward way to be black and middle class.

Men whose experience of bereavement was analysed for the purposes of this research, were all driven throughout their adult lives by the pursuit of construction of meaning in a legacy and a positive social memory that they would leave behind through their involvement in a cause with a specific purpose and contribution to society and community. Mr Thompson aspired participation in the wider society on equal terms and remembrance for his authority, honour, discipline and loyalty that he learned and acquired in the RAF. It was his wish that friends would honour him at his funeral with the accompaniment of the Barbadian steel band.



Picture: Barbadian Steel Band (author's own)

Mr Howarth was more interested in building upon the history of his African-Caribbean community by working upon its culture, collective memory, and social cohesion. Even the death of his children became part of a narrative that goes right back to the community's ancestral past and identifies with the principle of the ephemerality of life and acceptance of death. John who relates more directly to modern British society and its culture identifies with concepts of justice and fairness. In his life and through grief he is negotiating the way in which he will reach this end through identification with ancestral spiritual traditions that promised and delivered emancipation. Finally, Fred who worked hard throughout his life,

being realistic and trying to negotiate contradictory tendencies within himself and his social interactions, managed to find a way to exist in more than one cultures simultaneously. He serves a cause that promote cosmopolitanism and universalising identifications that transcend all boundaries. He works in the area of equalities, diversity and inclusion and does voluntary consultancy work applying his unique insight upon human subjectivity. Fred's job is a life path that he followed after his grandmother's death. Chance and circumstance coincided, and he was able to unleash his creative potential having found an eternal home in his grandmother's love and acceptance.

The pursuit of masculinity within a family and community framework was important to Mr Howarth, John and Fred, while Mr Thompson was more individualistic in his lifestyle and demeanour (although he aspired to venture out and recreate community within a colonial framework). His lack of success and realisation in society, however, implicated with his relationships, which impacted upon his bereavement and end-of-life care. Masculinity is an individualistic and modernist identification driven by the desire to succeed and be recognised in society. However, it needs to be balanced by humility in awareness that we are all part of a collective. In contexts where racism defines social life, humility is cultivated in attitudes attentive towards the family, kinship, and community. Rapport and creativity can be realised by being able to live in several diverse cultural landscapes simultaneously. Fred highlights the importance of grounded-ness and patience in transcending boundaries until one realises enlightenment - in this case following his grandmother's death.

## Chapter 8

### **Bereavement: Experiences of African-Caribbean women in Britain**

#### **Introduction**

African-Caribbean women's experiences of bereavement are structurally different to men's because they maintain a unique relationship to social organisation. Within a framework of heteronormativity, however porous and intersected within unequal contexts and societies, women's experiences need to be deconstructed, conceptualised and examined in conjunction with the discourses presented in chapter 7 for a complete theorisation of bereavement.

The strategies that people employ when they are bereaved and dealing with loss are not specific to certain ethnicities, cultural locations or gender/sex identifications. Hence, we may appreciate why the assumption that men grieve instrumentally and women emotionally has been challenged. Versalle and McDowell (2004-2005) have questioned the dichotomy between 'feminine' and 'masculine' grief where the former is associated with open displays of intense affect, support-seeking and sharing of emotion with others, while the latter represents a more rational, reserved and goal oriented response to loss (*see Corr, Nabe and Corr, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson, 1999; Stinson and Lasker, 1992 cited in Versalle and McDowell, 2004-2005: 55*). Moreover, they argue that there is no conclusive evidence that women's responses support them, while men's adversely impact upon their health (*see Gilbar & Dagan; Parkes & Brown cited in Versalle and McDowell, 2004-2005: 54*). Doka and Martin (2010) argued that both men and women grieve in a variety of ways so that we will benefit by locating responses to loss along a continuum from instrumental to emotional.

In this chapter, I will deconstruct this distinction and add to the debate by fleshing out arguments with evidence from African-Caribbean heritage experiences. Men and women draw from the same pool of strategies and resources in order to adapt to loss and cope with grief, but due to their unique relationship to social organisation experiences of bereavement follow different processes. Men are preoccupied with the construction of a positive social legacy for which they will be remembered and enter a family of dead ancestors. Women, on the other hand, with their intensified responsibilities in a racialised context of social reproduction (Thornton Dill, 1986), pursue more practical objectives such as greater independence and overcome the obstacles that historically prevented them from participating in social life and communicating their subjectivity. Death and grief are the motives and bereavement is the process through which both men and women reach out to realise their goals and aspirations in life.

Social life in Western societies and modern contexts have historically positioned meaning-making for men within rationalisation, evidence-based achievement and public recognition and for women within their roles in social reproduction and ability to nurture and support their dependants. In contexts of affluence and poverty the gravity of emphasis and intensity of these values may vary. In this respect, we may be able to justify and explain why in the literature men appear to grieve in instrumental while women in emotive ways, a social trend further complicated by social and cultural circumstances. In chapter 6, I observed and explained why women resort to counselling and psychotherapy during grief, while men indirectly negotiate their emotions while they participate in social life and activities. Their approach towards loss is shaped by their social roles and responsibilities within a modernist framework of heteronormativity in unequal social contexts.

Bereavement represents a time in a person's life when values previously taken for granted are being reconsidered. Existential insecurities awakened by the reality of death and dying highlight those relationships that need redefinition since they undermine the coping mechanisms of the bereaved. Hegemonic masculinity is individualistic and undermines family relationships and community cohesion, while community care is reliable, dependable but in circumstances of oppression and inequality reinforces subordination. Although African-Caribbean men and women may grieve in socially acceptable and culturally specific ways, they will reorient their priorities and values and may cultivate what they are lacking. Men may be required to work upon their communication and rapport with others, and women tend to work upon the realisation of their subjectivity to reinforce wellbeing for their own and their communities. Therefore, through bereavement people deconstruct their patterns and experiences and rehearse them before they change them. Bereavement signals a transformative period which may explain its role and prominence within social change in historical perspective.

The sociological deconstruction of the complexity of micro-processes and web relationships is heuristic in understanding gendered responses to loss. Although men's experiences have been theorised as instrumental and women's as emotional, it is actually the reverse that appears to be the end result of the bereavement process for African-Caribbean men and women. Versalle and McDowell (2004-2005) have a point in arguing that gendered grief varies within a continuum from instrumental to emotional, but there are also behavioural patterns that can be explored sociologically because they are related to people's identifications in particular contexts. Structure and culture play a role to influence social realities in specific ways that can only be explained rationally.

Historically, African-Caribbean women lived oppressed lives of hard work that demanded of them emotional investment within roles in productive and reproductive labour. Their racialization reinforced structural disadvantage and social marginality, and due to their invisibility, they identify more readily with grief and loss. Their understanding of the natural cycles of birth and death reinforces this knowledge, and socialisation into a culture of survival creates a social legacy in which death is central. Although rationalisation is necessary in contexts of dehumanisation, emotive expression compensates for lack of avenues of expression. Emotional, or in this case, symbolic expression has the same effect of building adaptive strategies through conceptualisation and rationalisation. By identifying the social relationships that make up their experience and rearranging them they promote structural change, empowerment, and independence. Meaning-making for women refers to the process of deconstruction that helps them understand their social position and the elements that make up their social lives so that they can promote change rather than find existential meaning. For this reason, they may find counselling constructive. Continuing bonds are also important to women especially when the relationship to the deceased is a source of inspiration that drives social readjustment.

### **African-Caribbean women in family and society**

Women's voices within the history of the black presence in the Western world have been submerged by a hegemonic male discourse. Their stories constitute a counter-narrative that needs to be further explored and deconstructed. Considerable research activity takes place within the literary studies tradition, and in feminist theorisations of gender and sexuality (Christian, 1985; Evans, 1984; Carby, 1989). Central in those narratives is the communication of the subjective position and experience of black women in Western societies, characterised by oppression and compounded by intensified labour. Their aim is

usually to negotiate and report possible routes to emancipation and independence. Bereavement and encounters with death are for African-Caribbean women experiences that serve this transformative purpose. For this reason, death constitutes a topic that preoccupies a number of well-known black female novelists like Tony Morisson (1987[2005]), Jamaica Kincaid (1998), Maya Angelou (1995; 2005) and Andrea Levy (1995). Bereavement outcomes among African-Caribbean women depend upon their position within the social structure. Their roles within social reproduction compounded by racialization and poverty require the reinforcement of individuality and independence, and bereavement facilitates this transformative process. In this section, I will briefly describe the historical background that shaped African-Caribbean women's social position and experiences in Western societies.

Disruption has been the single most frequent experience in the lives of black women in the Western world; either because of death, forced and voluntary separations, murder and violence or suicides (Thornton Dill, 1986). Despite women's role in promoting greater equality and employing spiritual connections, curses and threats of death to achieve this objective (Brown, 2008), they have primarily been involved in preserving life through socialisation in family units based upon nuclear family or kinship frameworks. For this reason, the theorisation of the black family as chaotic and dysfunctional has been challenged. Higman (1975) refers to studies (*see Smith, 1962; Greenfield, 1966; Patterson, 1967 sited in Higman, 1995: 261-262*) that propose alternative readings that recognise forms of family unions which were not stable or obligatory as a result of slavery and oppression. Walvin (2001) and Craton (1997) also report indication of preference for nuclear family formation among slaves, but slavery required adaptation and flexibility that invited variety and greater diversity. Accounts that advocate matrifocality and/or chaos (*see Higman, 1975*) may have been influenced by historical stereotypes about the nature and character of black women that construct their gender and sexuality as 'deviant' (*see Beckles, 1995*).



The conditions that shaped African-Caribbean women's relationships and experience originated in slavery, and specifically, in attempts to make effective use of female labour and fertility by a profit-making total institution (Beckles, 1995). They were believed to be physically capable of hard work in the fields, as well as, able to maintain sexual encounters without emotional attachment. Bush-Slimani (1993) argues that the female slaves' burden was dual because they were being treated as both asexual labour units and sexual objects in an attempt to control both production and reproduction on the plantations. Racial stereotypes about a strong black female maternal figure construct and sustain arguments about the dominance of black women and matrifocal family organisation. However, nuclear family and kin networks remained the aspired ideal for the protection and safety they provided. In precarious circumstances, women would go as far as to abort a pregnancy or commit infanticide (Bush-Slimani, 1993) to prevent exposure to risk. Patterson writes that female slaves went a long way to maintain a relationship with a father figure for their children and tried to strengthen self-esteem in men knowing that slavery impacted negatively upon relationships and interactions.

Black women in more recent history equally do not prefer or believe that they can 'father' their children (Black, 1995). Instead, they prefer to support their male counterparts and endure relationship hardship in order to provide a father figure for their children. Their social status as black females compounds their marginality, and for this reason, they struggle when they are left unsupported in structural disadvantage. The colonial stereotypes also established the nuclear family as normative, and women embrace popular ideologies and follow social expectations. However, due to the additional problems of their racialised position there are many forms of family within the African-Caribbean community, and as Black (1995) informs us we can better understand family organisation if we take into

consideration specific 'kinship events' that construct 'fathering' in the responsibility to buy children clothing, pay for school fees or take them out for a day. Mothers fulfil everyday tasks and take care of household responsibilities and childrearing. The nuclear family is still the ideal and efforts are made to compensate for disruption to established patterns of nuclear family organisation.

However, intensified responsibilities in productive economy and social reproduction may undermine black women's welfare and wellbeing. Lewis (1992) in his analysis of black women's literature presents female figures who try to provide for their children, fulfil the roles of motherhood, and maintain consideration for the welfare and emotional wellbeing of their male counterparts. Tony Morisson's *Beloved*, Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* and Neto's poem *Farewell at the Moment of Parting* portray mothers that do everything they can to provide for their children while remaining sensitive to often unsupportive partners. They are giving to the point of self-denial and manage to bring up and socialise their children in hardship. In my research, I found that African-Caribbean women in Britain are still dealing with the legacy of this historical pattern although they are overrepresented in employment (Modood, et al., 1997), and enjoy greater independence and opportunities. Modern living provides the opportunity to deconstruct experiences and problematic relationships that emanate from historical patterns of inequality and oppression, and bereavement presents the incentive to reorganisation.

### **African-Caribbean women in bereavement**

Women overcome the disadvantage of their social position by developing 'know how' to survive through their participation in the wider society and in African-Caribbean heritage community frameworks. Marginalised people who are not supported by the state and society

only find stability and security when they develop their independence. However, they remain protected within families and communities while they simultaneously work towards the realisation of more individualistic ideals. Slaves – particularly those that due to the organisation of the institution were separated from family and kin – had to undergo the same developmental process. Pazicky (1998) in an article titled *The Negro as the Ultimate Orphan* used the example of Frederick Douglass who found protection, love and motherly care in the community, but only managed to realise his individuality when he was able to provide for himself, participate within the wider society and live independently. The community is the surrogate mother that needs to be transcended if the personality is to become complete. Lack of protection and social orphanhood make the acquisition of independence challenging, but necessary. This is a pattern particularly relevant to the experience of African-Caribbean heritage women in Britain whose lives are intertwined with social reproduction within community frameworks. They need the community but must move beyond it and gain their independence to realise their identities, face challenges and survive adversity. As I have already argued this necessarily involves a process of hybridisation.

While experiencing grief for the loss of loved ones to death, women who participated in this research treated the mortal event as natural and responded by reorganising and mobilising adjustment processes. Death threatened their vested interests in family preservation and social reproduction, and they needed to respond by repositioning in order to protect themselves and reinforce survival for their dependents. Women's identification with family mobilises powerful instincts of survival that promote adaptation and flexibility. Despite loss and trauma working upon becoming independent will guarantee wellbeing for all. Modern popular emphasis upon individuality and feminism reinforce this identification among women. Death also represents a reality check and a wake-up call that reveals to the bereaved the quality of her relationships. Such an evaluation inevitably leads to changes because the

bereaved woman realises why certain things happened or why she felt in particular ways, which may or may not be directly related to the death and/or the deceased. Either way, her effort to take charge of the pain of grief will push her to put her life, relationships, and finances at the top of her list of priorities. In this context, unsupportive relationships will change or come to an end. Female bereavement is shaped by the negotiation of balance in women's relationships in society and with the opposite sex. A full reappraisal of social organisation takes place at this point in time, and African-Caribbean women invest into social participation on equal terms while still providing for their families and communities. In this way, they extend the functions of their involvement in social reproduction and in productive economy by adding social inclusion in the agenda, and by shaping their activities and undertakings towards this direction. The latter provides a firmer foundation upon which they can support their families and communities.

### ***Cynthia***

Cynthia grieved the deaths of her paternal uncle and aunt whose household she joined at the age of 16 when she left her parental home because her relationship with her mother was 'never very good'. Cynthia belongs to the category of migrant children who were left behind in the Caribbean with their grandparents while their parents settled and found work in Britain. They joined their parents later when they were able to afford it. Sometimes, like in Cynthia's case, the intervening period that separated children from parents was prolonged either because the grandparents did not want to relinquish the grandchildren, and/or because parents struggled in England.

Cynthia lived in Jamaica without her parents from 1 years old to the age of 9, and the only memory she had of them was through photographs. As a result, she had come to recognise her loving grandparents as parents. Arnold (2006) who studied the experiences of African-

Caribbean women who had been separated from their mothers through migration to the UK concluded that when memories of life with their grandparents are positive, they may struggle in their relationships and identifications, but they grow to become happy, successful and independent. Cynthia's story fits the proposed explanation.

*'I remember climbing trees, falling from them, getting into trouble, not worrying about it.'*

However, this attachment hypothesis can be elaborated by sociological insight. The mother-daughter conflict may also be the result of gendered relationships and interactions in racialised contexts because as Klass (2006) theorised attachments throughout life include wider social relationships. Cynthia's mother migrated from rural colonial society to a Western metropolis. She was working very hard but also had to be a mother and a wife under circumstances of financial strain. Her inability to understand her daughter's need for love and sympathy is because she had to harden to survive within a competitive, male-dominated and simultaneously racialised market economy.

Cynthia now recognises that her mother was particularly capable at pursuing her children's education and professional qualifications, and in this respect, she can see her mother in her. By having children herself she gained additional insight into her mother's subjectivity. However, Cynthia had already reconceptualised the meaning of family through her experience of finding a family within her grandparents' household and realised that family is about 'relating' rather than 'blood relationships'. Effortlessly, she changed families once again and made new siblings. In this respect, her positive experiences from her relationship with her grandparents were conducive to happiness and wellbeing in adult life, because they encourage self-respect and confidence in her subjective evaluation of relationships.

Cynthia became a well-educated successful professional in her adult life. Although she was highly practical and logical and made an effort to understand her psychological and social experience, she had to come to terms with the effects of her racialised position and gender relationships. Her conflict with her mother was a main source of concern that impacted upon the ways she related to others. Patriarchal patterns in heteronormative relationships also affected her life. They had 4 children with her husband that they raised together and managed to educate, but the relationship was maintained on a repeatedly interrupted basis for years until it finally ended in divorce. The end came when Cynthia's 'parents' - as she refers to her uncle and aunt – died within two-month distance from one another, and she made the decision to change undesirable aspects of her life.

Equipped with psychotherapeutic skills, Cynthia understands that our past shapes our present and, for this reason, she decided to take time off work – 6 months - in order to deconstruct her experience and rearrange her relationships. Although she was able to provide for her children and support her family, she did not have enough confidence in herself, her sense of individuality was insecure, and she did not feel fulfilled, happy and emotionally supported in her marriage. Her 'parents' supported her by listening to her problems and giving appropriate feedback, but when they died her grief and emotional hardship forced her to confront her relationships and respond by changing them so that she could regain her sense of wellbeing and stability interrupted by death.

Cynthia grieved for the loss of her 'parents' but her bereavement process involved a holistic evaluation of her entire life. Characteristically, when she entered counselling, she chose an organisation called 'Relate' that provides relationship counselling to couples and individuals. Her problem apart from overcoming the pain of loss included the ways in which

she related to certain people in her life, and her time of grief just seemed like a good opportunity to resolve all the issues at once. She defines grief and bereavement as diverse experiences that depend upon the circumstances of the bereaved. She acknowledges the social dimension of the experience when she argues that grief was not her only problem, but ‘grief, separation and loss all enmeshed’. In this way, she draws connections to her social relationships and position in society.

Cynthia’s choices in life aided her bereavement process because she had accumulated knowledge and developed skills that she used to overcome crisis. Her practicality and reason enabled her to observe patterns and respond appropriately and timely to situations. For example, she learned the value of patience and acceptance, knowing that life will eventually transform.

*‘There is no eureka moment. Life just goes on.’*

She also knew that grief depends upon the way in which the deceased handled their death and dying.

*‘Suffering and death leave the bereaved wondering if the deceased suffered.’*

Cynthia knows this from personal experience because upon her departure from Jamaica her grandfather told her:

*‘When you hear that I have passed you will not cry because I will be happy.’*

And to this day, Cynthia did not shed a tear because she had said her last goodbye to her grandfather and accepted their separation as final before he actually died, when they were separated by long geographical distance. Bereavement is, therefore, dependent upon rapport and communication of the experience of dying with those who will grieve the loss, and it can be experienced before the deceased's physical death, knowing that it is what will happen next. When someone actually dies, it comes as no surprise to the bereaved that has already grieved their loss and has conceptualised the place of the deceased in their life. In her bereavement as an adult, understanding of African-Caribbean cultural meanings relating to death and loss aid communication with people in her community who support her and make her feel included within a wider social framework. People that used to know her 'parents' provide the medium through which Cynthia maintains ongoing conversations with them, gains consolation and comfort and knows that they are 'okay'.

Celebratory funerary rituals 'are part of the grieving process' in that they take your thoughts away from 'anger about the loss' and make you 'think about the family'. They involve 'reflection about the deceased' and 'console bereaved families and individuals'. Cynthia is a regular visitor at the luncheon centre for ethnic minority senior citizens because she feels connected to the people with whom her 'parents' formed a 'family'. In this way, she practices continuing bonds with her deceased 'parents'.

Cynthia now feels empowered and confident that she can cope with any type of adversity. Grief through death invited reflection upon issues that refer to Cynthia's entire life course, because they are all relevant to how loss was lived and experienced. This adds insight to some of the questions asked in the literature review, suggesting a relationship between different types of loss.



In deconstructing her experience, Cynthia was also aided by her knowledge of black women's history in the Western world. She understands that part of the problem in her relationships is related to what women in her culture experienced in the past during slavery and beyond. During bereavement she was able to open-up to those issues in order to change her relationships because they prevented her from 'moving on' from the pain of loss.

*'Women were raped and abused, and still had to produce children and love that child.'*

*'All the -isms are still there. We need to free our minds from mental slavery. "I am not good enough", "I am black" you got to move out of this. Once you get out others will follow.'*

Through coping with loss and grief Cynthia learned realised her individuality. She gained a stronger sense of self, re-identified, expanded her knowledge and transformed her social position. Patterns in gender relationships compounded by historical processes of subordination and stereotyping reflected upon her life, but Cynthia had the opportunity to structurally change the situation. The latter constructs death as socially transformative.

A woman who found herself in the public gaze due to her son's murder, Doreen Lawrence, also separated from her husband during bereavement. In 1999, seven years after Stephen's murder, Doreen and her husband Neville divorced because they made different choices in their grief. Doreen chose to stay in England to fight endless legal battles and construct Stephen's legacy that shaped policy and society, while Neville felt rejected by a citizenship that did not protect his family and decided to withdraw to Jamaica permanently. Doreen admits that there were problems in the relationship.

*'I think probably things were going wrong before Stephen's death. I've got nobody in my life since then. You know, you can go out with lots of people and still be on your own.'*

(Doreen Lawrence in BBC One Panorama, 2012)

Doreen's deep-seated need for communication and empathic understanding was not satisfied within her marriage. When Stephen died, with all the social issues that surrounded his death, Doreen was forced to express her opinions firmly and succinctly. She made her own choices independent of her husband and with her son's memory as a guide she influenced policy aimed at addressing institutional racism. Doreen with her honest approach was able to maintain ongoing conversations with her deceased son:

*'I talk to him in my head. I just talk to him about how we are, what we are doing. I like to have that time that I can talk to him.'*

(Doreen Lawrence in BBC One Panorama, 2012)

Cynthia maintained continuing bonds with her 'parents' because she wanted to prove to them that she was able to lead a fulfilling and independent life that they would be proud of, after they were gone. In order to materialise their wishes and maintain their memory she rehearsed the patterns of their interactions during visits at the community of senior citizens who used to be her parents' friends. At the same time, she contributed a cause to the African-Caribbean community because she entered the female-led group of African-Caribbean informal carers. Her contribution honoured the deceased, sustained their continuing bonds and gave Cynthia a sense of agency and belief in her ability to influence social conditions.

However, it is not all types of continuing bonds that promote wellbeing and part of the bereavement process is to learn how to manage uncomfortable and disorienting emotions and contain them without suppressing them. This is achieved through positive, casual communication with the deceased. For example, Doreen is aware that she needs to avoid allowing herself to sink into depression, because it deprives her of drive and willingness to participate in social life and fulfil her purpose.

*'No, I can't read it, no. I don't know, I find it difficult. Cause when I look at, you know, what he could achieve and his work here, I just, em, no. I am not ready to read this yet. In the early days there was days when I locked myself in my room, I didn't come out, and that was really a dark place. And I know once you in this it is very difficult to take yourself back out. And I was worried about allowing myself to go back there.'*

*(Doreen Lawrence in BBC News, 2012)*

Continuing bonds in the form of casual conversations serve the purpose of filtering emotions because a normal relationship can be maintained between the bereaved and the deceased, and the bereaved is able to focus upon the positive aspects of a harmonious relationship provided that they respect the character, identity and life of the deceased. For this reason, African-Caribbean women engage in meaning-making and grief work to structurally change their lives, in a way, that will reinforce their relationship with the deceased. Unlike men they are not concerned with existential meaning, perhaps because their oppressed historical experience and understanding of natural processes of birth, death and rebirth satisfy those concerns. Their practicality and grounded approach to life and loss construct them as resilient to disadvantage and racism.

Responses to bereavement largely depend upon ways in which men and women are differentially positioned within social organisation. Race compounds relationships and culture shapes responses to loss, but the experiences discussed in this thesis are equally products of Westernised modes of gender identification. Characteristically, African-Caribbean women are acutely aware of their inner-processes which they attempt to control and change to influence their social circumstances in processes of grief work and/or continuing bonds. Within this approach to bereavement, constructive assessments of all relationships support social orientation and awareness purposes, necessary in the implementation of further structural changes to personal and public lives and lifestyles. In Cynthia's case, for example, the most challenging relationship, her relationship to her biological mother, was the one that helped her gain insight into social issues, and after persistent reflection she realised that they shared a lot in common. For African-Caribbean women race is an additional factor that compounds, and for this reason, highlights gender relationships.

### ***Mary***

Mary is different to other participants because she does not identify with the migration legacy. She arrived in the UK at the age of 24 with her British husband who she met in Jamaica. Her case illustrates the implications of gender socialisation and its consequences upon the psychological make-up and experiences of women. Her bereavement was shaped by her upbringing to be a responsible carer, taking part in social reproduction and looking after everyone in the household. Although for most people bereavement is an individualistic process, Mary could only define her personal identifications in relationship to the care and welfare of others. As a result, she could not relax, claim her individuality and explore new possibilities of life and living. She was confined in a provider role with work and care obligations.

Mary's early experiences explain her response to bereavement. Her mother was a teacher and her father a builder, community leader, church leader or lay preacher; and together they offered their services to the community. However, Mary's mother was unsuitable for raising children and her father assigned this role to his eldest daughter, Mary. Having learned the principles of self-denying care and responsibility during childhood, Mary became a perfectionist who feels obliged to tolerate irresponsibility, sort out everyone's problems, and financially provide for them. Although she conceptualises her child labour as intensified, she gains a sense of pride from having successfully delivered the mission assigned to her. She transferred the roles that she learned in childhood right into her adulthood, and tries to champion at work, studies, care relationships and sport. Mary was a professional athlete in shot put and even now in her 60s she trains at competitive level. However, her perfectionism leaves her feeling lonely, helpless, and distanced from other people. Despite loss and misfortune, Mary blames herself for not having done more to help others. Bereavement did not have the effect of relaxing her defence strategies or equipping her with self-compassion and understanding towards.

Two experiences taught Mary that she could only be valued and praised when she has nurtured and cared for others. Although she claimed her individuality in some respects, she cannot relinquish her carer identifications and does not behave assertively in interactions with others. When a younger sibling was born sick and was in danger of dying and her mother rejected it the doctor told Mary that she had to make sure that this baby survives. Mary's heart sank and she started crying when she realised the seriousness and enormity of her task, which she effectively delivered. On another occasion, at the age of 10 she witnessed the traumatic death of her brother who got burned while helping Mary to change the babies' nappies. Mary was responsible for her 12 siblings and had her brother who was a year older

than her helping her occasionally. It was late at night and Mary woke him from bed to hold the oil lamp for her. He was dosing off, the lamp fell on the floor and he got burned. He died from pneumonia at the hospital because they tried to extinguish the fire by throwing water on him. According to Mary, it was the water, not the fire that killed him.

Mary knows that her brother's death was not her fault and it was her parents who held themselves responsible for negligence, and felt guilty. However, the experience was traumatic, and if we consider that Mary had until then successfully delivered nurturing care for her siblings, the loss was experienced as failure and reinforced her need to do more for others in order to make sure that they are safe. It is likely that she did not fully evaluate the meaning of her brother's loss and her traumatic experience, because in the context of the interview she broke down and cried. She then tapped her feet on the floor recollecting the incident, before she pulled herself together again. Mary then explained to me that she had never cried that way before about her brother's death, and that she was saddened by the fact that her family grieved for years. She believes that her parents never really recovered from the trauma and loss. Mary was the one who always held the family together, and the accident has got a role to play in her attitude. She is still looking after her whole family in Jamaica, her son and new partner but feels largely unsupported.

*'When he [her father] died the responsibility was mine. He has got twelve of us and apart from the brother that died they are all living. But the burial was my responsibility and everything else is always my responsibility. The whole family is my responsibility. And I'm just the eldest girl. I'm not the eldest child.'*

*'I don't feel supported by my current partner. I feel he takes a lot, yeah. And my son takes a lot. He is brilliant, but he takes a lot as well.'*

Mary decided to change the way she related to her parental family when she met her husband and decided to create a family of her own. Her father objected to her moving to England and made her feel guilty for leaving them behind. However, Mary was determined. She wanted to do something for herself, and love was a good incentive and justification. Maya Angelou (2011) equates love with freedom in her poem *Love's Exquisite Freedom* and Mary certainly felt liberated from family attachments when she met her husband. Mary's relationship with her father had severed when at the age of 18 he chastised her for something that was her mother's fault. He was criticised by the community and Mary felt entitled to leave after the incident. Nonetheless, Mary was introduced to adult gender roles at a very young age when she was still unable to protect or defend herself and assert her subjectivity. In her adult life despite willingness to do things for herself, she returns to the same patterns that she learned during her early socialisation. When her father got sick with a heart condition twelve years after Mary's migration to the UK, she tried to help him by offering to pay for his travel and health care in England. He refused her offer because he felt that the illness was sent from God and tried to remain faithful to the Christian scripture that says:

*'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away.'*<sup>14</sup>

He was 70 years old and felt privileged to pass away at the age specified in the Bible as the right age to die. For this reason, he refused Mary's offer to travel to England to have a pacemaker fitted, which would have saved his life. Mary's grief continues because she blames herself for not having been there to persuade him and help him in his illness. Her

---

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 90: 10 The Bible King James Version (Carroll & Prickett, 2008).

socialisation into a nurturing role compounded her bereavement which in turn under the circumstances that it happened confirmed her self-doubts, inner-guilt and need to always be the one to save others. Given the circumstances and developments in her marriage that I will shortly discuss, she doubted her choice to leave her parental family and follow her husband in the UK. In her bereavement process this may have been experienced as guilt that reinforced Mary's care identifications.

The opportunity to realise her individuality and escape victimisation came when Mary was pushed out of her comfort zone and what was familiar with her husband leaving her for another woman. She had no choice but to do something for herself. The relationship became emotionally abusive, and Mary had to fight to secure child-support for their son. She found a solution in taking responsibility of herself and her son's future by re-qualifying as a social worker to increase her income. She was already a teacher, but her qualification was not valid in England and during her married life she stayed at home while trying to further her education. By re-qualifying she became a successful social worker and later moved on to consultancy.

Mary's case study provides a revealing example of the consequences of unequal gender relations. It deconstructs the subjectivity of oppressed women and highlights the dangers and threats to their wellbeing and emotional integrity. Mary was still a child when she absorbed the influences and definitions of her social environment. For this reason, her issues as an adult that impact upon grief and bereavement are compounded. Mary's intensified productive and reproductive labour responsibilities represent the experience of many African-Caribbean women who never realised their dreams either because they exercised patience or remained unaware of alternatives. Mary's tears several times during the interview reveal that she had not previously conceptualised her experiences, the severity of which was



manifested when called to reflect upon loss. Mary still gains her identity from caring roles and still struggles in her personal relationships but her financial independence makes her feel worthy. She values awards and recognition and has won several prizes. She still feels that she has not done much for others and experiences a sense of failure, but she is proud of her son who is dyslexic but managed to complete a Master's degree. Her relationship with her mother who has a very different perspective upon the past has gradually improved, and for the past three years Mary has been visiting her at Christmas in Jamaica. Despite loss and Mary's inability to value her own self, she managed to survive because she was used to coping and persevering. Britain was the right place to do it because it offered educational and work opportunities, welfare and protection. In this respect, Mary found in Britain the opportunity to become independent and look after herself whether she pursued such a goal or not. Although she shared herself with others, she still managed to gain merits that improved her wellbeing and levels of happiness.

## **Continuing bonds**

### ***Anne***

Anne is 42 years old, lives in an urban city in the South-West of England, and seven years ago she experienced the sudden death of her father from complications of diabetes and sickle-cell anaemia. The loss of father in her family shattered their existential security because it was the first death that they experienced<sup>15</sup>, and he was a lively key figure in the family and community for which he provided financial support and protection. Anne has three sisters and two brothers, and her mother is Mrs Grace whose experience of

---

<sup>15</sup> A community representative (Melissa) who works as council employee informed me that for many families death is a 'new experience'. The migrant generation is gradually descending into old age and die, while their children had ordinarily never experienced a death in the immediate family because their grandparents lived back in the West Indies and many of the second generation have never met them. Anne and her siblings seem to fit into this category.

bereavement has been analysed in chapter 6. They were all deeply affected by the loss, and mostly Mrs Grace. The community supported them during their grief through prayers and verbal encouragement. They are all members of a local Pentecostal church which has in place processes for the support of the bereaved that aim to ‘lift their spirits’ and support them with visits, prayers and food offerings. At the funeral Anne realised how well-respected and important her father was, because it was well attended, and people kept coming to tell the family what a good doer their father had been and how he had helped them. The experience made Anne want to be like her father. Having a similar response and treatment by the community at her own funeral would be the confirmation that she has achieved in life. But to get there Anne has got to make an important contribution to her community, be a paradigmatic figure or create a social legacy for which she will be remembered and commemorated.

Anne’s sentiments of belonging lie within her African-Caribbean church community in Britain. She has visited her parents’ birthplace in Jamaica once in her life, only to realise her difference and British references. Although she identifies with a communitarian religious philosophy that defies injustice and oppression in society, this is not exclusive of identification with British individualistic and feminist ideals. Anne has lived a single life pursuing education and career, but always referred to her Christian community for moral support and guidance. For reasons that partly have to do with social disadvantage, Anne has not yet realised her aspirations, but she is committed to her goals and purpose.

Anne, like many other people in the African-Caribbean community identify with family, community and kinship ideals, which they keep separate from individualistic identifications in modern capitalist societies. In this respect, they lead double lives, a phenomenon which has been theorised by Du Bois (1903) as ‘doubleness’ that led to more recent hybridity

theories in the cultural studies tradition in Britain (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996). The mode in which people position themselves within society affects their attitude towards bereavement, because as Klass and Goss (2003) contend the individual narratives that shape grief and attitudes towards the dead ancestors are constructed in the context of larger cultural narratives that arrange politics, society, and relationships. In Anne's case there is no single dominant cultural narrative that affects her grief, and her experience requires speculative deconstruction, as well as description of its cultural multiplicity and sociological relevance.

Anne's bereavement has been shaped by her family and community membership and ways in which people are memorialised and incorporated into a family of dead ancestors, as much as it has been defined by modern individualistic identifications. In fact, she feels that it is her responsibility towards her community and lineage to serve purposes of social regulation through the practice of death and other rituals. She identifies with a black female carer role in recognition of structural disadvantage that motivates her to participate in efforts of collective social reproduction and care. However, like Frederick Douglass (2004) she understands that to contribute towards collective social advancement she has to enter the wider society and be able to participate on equal terms, while providing assistance and vision to her community. This is a collective goal that many black people achieved, but many more did not, and it is their lack of protection from their citizenship status and institutional racism that reinforces the identification but also prevents its realisation. Women, despite all odds, have made significant contributions to their communities and the wider society because their marginal status and oppression makes it more important to promote social change.

Anne's father gained recognition within his community and realised his personal identifications within a racist post-migration society. This means that he was able to provide for his family and financially assist community members in need. His objective has been the

maintenance of stable and harmonious relationships in all interactions within the African-Caribbean community and the wider society. His approach granted him relative financial prosperity that enabled him to adopt the respectable provider role. His death highlighted his life because at the funeral the community memorialised his character and contribution. Anne was pleasantly surprised by the realisation of her father's importance, despite her grief. Pentecostalism in the African-Caribbean community represents a response to racialization and marginality and involves church members collaborating to help and shield one another from pervasive discouragement and self-doubt inflicted by society's stereotypes and racism. In mortuary experiences this function is extended to support the bereaved and protect them against loss of existential meaning.

The experience of her father's funeralisation and grief nurtured a new identification in Anne, which was further cultivated in her maintenance of continuing bonds with her deceased father. In line with Marwit and Klass's (1994-1995) theorisation of continuing bonds, Anne's father became the role model that provides global identification and prescribes a way of life. Anne adopted her father's example and devoted herself to the pursuit of his philosophy of life and communitarian politics, using different methods and means in an effort to professionalise and streamline her services for greater impact. Besides her involvement in her church community to has supportive structures in place, Anne started a degree in Social Work and gained several other qualifications.

Anne's obstacle to achieving her goals throughout her life and during her bereavement has been her lack of understanding of the sociological processes that inform her experience. The religious community's approach towards a society that racialised and marginalised its members replaced disaffection with love for God who promises worldly justice. In this way, faith conceals history for those without direction connection to it. According to Neimeyer

and Levitt (2000) this is common in the experience of marginalised groups such as non-heteronormative and ethnic minority communities. Characteristically, African-Caribbean religious communities may or may not directly identify with an enslaved ancestry because this historical experience has been marginalised by a hegemonic colonial discourse that constructed it as stigmatising. However, what is evident is the consequences of a painful history, such as the creation of adaptive identifications within the framework of immediate family and kinship units, using traditional philosophical theories and ritualistic practices.

Klass and Goss (2003) argue that the role model relationship with the deceased enables the bereaved to maintain internal social regulation, which according to psychologists provides the solace needed to be able to live harmoniously in society (*see Horton in Klass and Goss, 2003: 791*). Anne's need for solace was the product of her father's death and was satisfied by his image that she carefully crafted in conversations with people that knew him (Walter, 1996), and were able to add to an evolving narrative of her father's character and life. Although his example provided Anne with an ethical compass towards society and life and gave her purpose and direction, his structural position and gender did not necessarily provide Anne with an insight on how to go about transforming her life. He lived within structures in which different values applied that do not necessarily serve Anne's aims.

Jason did not have a choice but to enter a working-class marginal community and reproduce traditional notions of respectability and protection within a religious community of people who shared identifications and experiences. Anne, however, could take advantage of opportunities in education and employment, but had to first acknowledge the influence of racism in her experience in order to discover what she needed to do to realise her aspirations. Coming to terms with her heritage, discovering her ancestry and configuring the politics of

difference and identity that apply to her case and experience could potentially support this process.

Anne's learning disability in conjunction with racist stereotypes led to her stigmatisation as underachiever in the British education system and prevented her progression. Despite persistent effort on her part and desire to enter higher education, as well as greater awareness about disability and racialisation, Anne's experience did not qualitatively change. Greater understanding and acknowledgment of processes in which racism plays key role would enable Anne to communicate her subjective experience and assert her needs in a way that would enable her to meet her aspirations.

Anne's case represents the two directions taken within theorisations of continuing bonds. On one hand, her experience provides evidence of continuing bonds constructed in social relationships and group categories and identifications (Klass, 2006; Walter, 1996; Valentine, 2008; 2009). On the other, continuing bonds are experienced as an inner relationship with the deceased (Schut et al., 2006; Field, 2006). However, the latter are also shaped by community and wider social relationships in which the bereaved individual participates. Walter (1996) and Valentine (2007b; 2008) who carried out their sociological studies in Britain and analysed individualistic and postmodern responses to loss demonstrate that even in this case, the experience of practicing continuing involves the negotiation of social relationships with wider social implications for the bereaved. Klass (2001) explains how continuing bonds are constructed in group contexts among bereaved parents in North America. The continued relationship with the child is then acted out in further conversations and in everyday life. Anne continued and developed her relationship with her father in conversations regulated by religious understandings, with fellow members of her African-Caribbean community; and on this basis, she developed an inner relationship that she acted

out in her choice to pursue a career in social work and a philosophy of life promising to serve purposes of personal and collective development.

Other participants of this research maintained continuing bonds with deceased relatives and loved ones in cultural processes made meaningful in interactions with others. This can turn into a postmodern form of ancestral worship that serves modernist identifications and satisfies existential concerns in racialised contexts. Mr Howarth, for example, was happy to submit his grief and narratives of the death of his two children into an on-going cultural legacy that promotes resilience and safeguards survival in the black community. He had already contributed to the creation of an organised community funded by the local council and with the public maintenance of continuing bonds with his deceased children he added to its cultural elaboration while he grieved in a way that served his identifications and lifetime ideals.

Cynthia and Mrs Grace continued to interact with people that knew the deceased and chose to stay within the same social circles that sustained memories and enabled continuing bonds to emerge and be maintained. In this way, the bereaved were able to sustain a consoling sense of presence of the deceased in social relationships that also provided counsel and support when needed. The reproduction of relationship patterns in continuing bonds conceptualise society and organisation, while they enable the bereaved to re-position and readjust as they adapt to loss. For African-Caribbean women who need to understand the inner implications of racial and gender inequalities, the practice of this type of continuing bonds is crucial to their effort to promote structural changes that affirm and enhance their subjectivity. Partly, continuing bonds served this purpose for Anne. Whatever could not change in the present, evolved into a creative vision projected into the future with significant socially transformative potential.

Continuing bonds serve purposes of social regulation but they can also be utilised in promoting radical change and readjustment. This is when people develop identifications with the deceased in inner representations that promote agency and action. Conflict in the relationship between the bereaved and society and/or the deceased may have this effect. John, for example, used his mother's memory to deconstruct competitive gender and racialised relationships that he located within a historical perspective. The process enabled him to understand his experiences and change a potentially life-threatening lifestyle. Sharon had difficulty in managing her dual heritage and her problematic relationship with her parents. However, she developed inner representations of her deceased grandmother that encouraged her to pursue her individuality in a fulfilling musical career. Anne was dealing with class, gender, race, age and identity issues that she struggled to successfully negotiate. Her duality had to be embraced possibly by developing hybrid identifications in order to be able to incorporate diverse and often competitive drives into her life in a harmonious way. Continuing bonds allowed these participants to create their own theories about their respective social positions and relationships that helped them to be innovative and creative in implementing important positive changes to their lives. What they all share in common is the modernist pursuit of realisation of individuality, made possible by the utilisation of postmodern freedom and relativity.

The individualistic nature of continuing bonds in Western societies can still be defended as a social experience because it depends upon modes of identification that involve wider cultural narratives that link the individual to family, community and kinship, and to society (Klass, 2006). Studies that theorise continuing bonds in the postmodern social condition (Walter, 1996; Valentine, 2007b; 2008) rightfully emphasise individuality. However, speculation into social structures and relationships informed by a historical perspective will



reveal additional insights, which have not yet been thoroughly considered. There is considerable evidence that class, gender, and racial or ethnic differences interact with experiences of bereavement (Field et al. 1997). If the argument about the potential of continuing bonds to have a positive influence upon the bereaved is to be defended (Field, 2006) then we ought to look into the ways in which continuing bonds transform social organisation, empowering individuals in the process (Holst-Warhaft, 2000). The contextual factors involved in each case provide guidance upon areas and issues that we ought to investigate. In the case of diasporas and ethnic minorities we ought to look at experiences of race and racism and their intersections with gender and class.

## **Conclusion**

African-Caribbean women's bereavement is shaped by their social position and gendered disadvantage. For this reason, an experience that promotes adaptation and readjustment because it disturbs the existential security and structural conditions of the bereaved, invites social reorganisation and new identifications. Women unlike men do not doubt their value and worth and their bereavement does not represent a process of recovery of self-esteem through recognition in reciprocal interactions and relationships. Their experience involves intensified participation in productive economy and social reproduction, a reality that becomes at the point of death exposed because the emotional resources of the bereaved are depleted while they find little support in their immediate environment.

Emotionality that has remained relatively poorly defined in the bereavement literature can be attributed to women's social position that requires selfless investment in affective attachments. Grief may be expressed in culturally specific and gendered ways, but practically, the effort of bereavement strengthens the subjectivity of bereaved women.

African-Caribbean women have participated in both productive economy and social reproduction but remained relatively marginal and their labour remained invisible and unappreciated. Bereavement provides the opportunity to claim their individuality and change the terms and conditions of their relationships.

Due to their key role in social reproduction African-Caribbean women are familiar with socialisation processes, and death is one of them. In addition, their understanding of death is informed by survival motives and priorities that underwrite structures which protect community members and accommodate their dying and bereavement needs. Continuing bonds organise those systems of care because they preserve memory and meaning in contexts of fragmentation and racialisation. For this reason, the female participants of this research were all involved in some care role (formal or informal). An official effort to provide care to the aging population of African-Caribbean migrants was taking place at the community for senior citizens where I carried out observations for this research. Although the organisation had secured minimum funding from the local council it occupied a number of informal female carers and women who found a context to apply traditional practices of care within a kin and community network. Paid employees worked overtime without pay and their justification for working on an exceptionally low salary was the meaning and value of their job and its social contribution. They combined cultural expertise and trust with mainstream social services in order to provide members with the best possible care, access to opportunities and participation in social life.

African-Caribbean women organise groups that facilitate the collective remembrance of community members who have passed away. They talk about them in the context of casual conversations using visual material, photographs and videos to stimulate remembrance and construct and preserve a legacy that will unite a community and educate future generations.

Women also play a key role at organising funerals. They have created a group that caters at funerals, makes burial and funeral arrangements, and visits the bereaved at home to provide companionship and assist them with practical tasks and reorganisation. Continuing bonds constitute a central motive in the process because the community is united on the basis of common ancestry which is being ritualistically maintained. Continuing bonds have been reported to have both collective and individual meaning. Women play a central role in constructing and maintaining continuing bonds due to their role in socialisation and interest in preserving attachments, but also employ them in order to facilitate radical change and social reorganisation for self, the community and the wider society.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Resilience and social change in African-Caribbean experiences of bereavement**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis studied bereavement from a sociological perspective by taking into consideration historical social patterns established in colonial slave societies. In this context, I discursively analysed social organisation in terms of a relationship between social structure and actors' interactions in which social stereotypes play a defining role. Chapters 4 and 5 set the social context and presented the theoretical framework in which experiences of bereavement were subsequently interpreted. The aim to access insider meanings communicated in marginal African-Caribbean heritage communities in Britain and provide a counter narrative that values the role of unequal social organisation required the formulation of a sociological analytical framework. This was not my priority initially, but evidence highlighted the significance of intersections between gender and race and indicated that historical patterns in which processes of stereotyping played organisational role define bereavement experiences. For this reason, I deconstructed contextual and inter-generational social relationships before I presented case studies that demonstrate their relevance.

My conceptualisation of social organisation includes explanations proposed by historians and social theorists that link slavery to capitalism (Williams, 1944; Trouillot, 1992; Palmie, 1996a&b; Craton, 1997; Walvin, 2001; Klein, 2010). However, to provide a more complete sociological explanation and contextualise my research findings, I also deconstructed social organisation and theorised economic, political and cultural relationships in historical

perspective. In chapter 4, I explained that in marginal communities, scarcity of resources defines experience and maintains class, race and gender categories despite postmodern relativism. For this reason, I elaborated upon the analysis of modern forms of social organisation and conceptualised relationships as manifestations of ‘advanced’ or ‘late’ modernity (Giddens, 1990). In this way, I provide a framework that informs basic bereavement outcomes within efforts to promote social change in the face of disturbance and need for reorganisation caused by fragmentation and loss.

Nonetheless, I equally considered fewer rigid structures which are the outcome of changing modes of thinking and relating in postmodern societies. In this context, I argued that African-Caribbean identities utilise the opportunity to cross boundaries and categories in order to adapt and survive in unequal societies. This process started early in slave societies with the development of creole cultures. However, postmodernism gives these processes renewed significance, additional incentives and opportunities for expression. In contemporary societies similar intensified processes have been conceptualised in theories of cultural hybridity. In this thesis, I argued that hybrid identities are born out of loss and trauma to cope with uncertainty and threat in unequal social contexts. They are flexible, reflexive and resilient identities that define the African-Caribbean culture of grief and responses to loss.

However, further research needs to be done to explore the complexity of postmodern processes and relationships and their impact upon grief and bereavement. I anticipate that such research will be more productive in large metropolitan centres like London where transnational networks operate. The extent to which new modes of relating and organising will empower bereaved African-Caribbean people and provide them with additional resources will depend upon whether citizens will be able to relate to difference compassionately and adopt a wider definition of community that includes marginalised

populations. The latter will have the effect of relaxing old boundaries which in this research still appeared to be significant.

Bourdieu's (1972, 1980) concept of 'habitus', which refers to the range of dispositions by which actions and attitudes become habitual in practice, is useful in understanding how African-Caribbean cultures evolve in the context of repeated disruptive encounters with loss. Analysis of the experience of mortality and dispossession in historical perspective revealed inequalities that reflect and reproduce social structures and create a cultural capital through which experiences of hardship are interpreted and managed. In this way, social problems persist, but marginal groups survive because they understand and negotiate their experiences, in an effort to promote social change.

The complexity of my analysis was essential to the study of an inherently diverse experience such as bereavement because it positioned peoples' experiences within a framework in which the identification of patterns creates 'ideal type' scenarios (Weber, 2010). Structural inequality justified by constructions of race shapes culture and behaviour observable in gender and sexual attitudes. The latter may reflect social problems and identifications that bereaved people negotiate as they grieve to reposition themselves in society.

As African-Caribbean people deconstruct the social structures and cultures that create their experiences during bereavement, they reflexively hybridise their identifications, update and refine them. In this context, social relationships change, and the community becomes cohesive, resilient, flexible, and more involved/included within the larger society. In this respect, social reality is reflexively constructed (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Identifications with colonial culture and its divisive ideology created competitive interactions among African-Caribbean people and influenced social organisation. Impacts were experienced differently by men and women, and to this day, they have an intergenerational effect upon the lives of African-Caribbean people. In this thesis, I have demonstrated that these relationships shape bereavement outcomes, not necessarily because they describe the relationship with the deceased, but because they prescribe the social readjustment that the bereaved is required to undertake following loss. Therefore, bereavement is about social accommodation within a gender and racial framework in which the bereaved is positioned, rather than the nature of relationship with the deceased - although the latter is also relevant.

In addition, it is the African-Caribbean culture of grief born out of historical trauma and structural inequality that inflects responses to loss and equips people with resilience to manage bereavement's transition. Culture articulates notions that conceptualise life as a struggle and mobilise processes of growth based on the accumulation of knowledge gained in historical perspective. In this context, African-Caribbean people learn adaptive strategies and develop the ability to find meaning in circumstances that by Western standards are considered devastating, dangerous and destructive.

Identification with traditional, on one hand, and postmodern, on the other, structures and relationships represents a cautious, reserved but socially transformative approach to life, in circumstances of marginality. It enables people to remain vigilant and proactive, accept loss as part of life and promote survival in culturally prescribed ways and socially adaptive strategies. Such an approach includes and accepts death in its cultural framework and finds meaning in the survival of the community. Continuity is identified not only among the living, but also within an ancestral community that gains immortality through remembrance in

rituals, and in peoples' projected identifications that extend beyond the material world to satisfy existential questions.

In this way, African-Caribbean people articulate notions of loss that enable them to effectively manage transitions as a way of promoting social change and surviving hardship. In experiencing loss and as they reposition within the social structure during this time of liminality, they find the opportunity to use the experience and the liberation from responsibilities that it offers to transform undesirable and unequal social circumstances. Culturally and through repeated exposures to vulnerability, loss and grief throughout history, African-Caribbean heritage communities learned to respond to bereavement in this manner. This is an alternative and potentially empowering mode of social organisation through loss.

African-Caribbean responses to bereavement and outlook on life and death denotes neither pathology nor a modernist defiance against dehumanisation, loss and hardship that provides a reason to celebrate. Instead, it represents a process of social adaptation where humanity and freedoms are limited and compromised. Under stress and pressure people become adversely affected, but the ability to adapt indicates that meaning reconstruction is possible and part of the African-Caribbean cultural repertoire. The strain of marginality and oppression means that grief and loss are states of being, rather than an isolated experience, but meaning reconstruction is also ongoing and part of a culture inspired by inequality.

The African-Caribbean approach towards death and dying also represents a political stance and communicates perceptions of status and positionality. It expresses sentiments on political subordination and marginality, and advocates hybrid identifications that reflexively negotiate partial incorporation and inclusion in society. Grief as a state of being accompanied by adaptive reorganisation requires a measured and carefully calculated approach to life that



can also be seen as reflexive and anti-essentialist. Hybridity is employed and renegotiated in experiences that feature loss because it is an identity mobilised by the experience. While people grieve and engage in meaning reconstruction, they elaborate their meanings with flexible but robust and resilient identifications which are realistic and offer options to disadvantaged groups.

In the rest of this chapter, I will make some concluding remarks on African-Caribbean understandings of loss and responses to the experience in order to evaluate the encounter's potential for growth and describe how social change is promoted in interactions with grief. I will then address the way in which African-Caribbean understandings of loss implicate with bereavement processes. Finally, I will conclude with recommendations for future research on the topic of bereavement in contexts of loss and trauma.

### **Grief, growth and hybridity**

African-Caribbean experiences in Britain describe the evolution of a diasporic community, the culture of which has been elaborated by hybridisations and encounters with loss and trauma. Links were facilitated by migration and globalisation that reinforced transnational black political movements in the West. Part of the African-Caribbean colonial heritage refers to an affiliation with British culture and asserts vested interests in maintaining networks and relationships with the country they came to recognise as Motherland. Although this relationship severed when the illusion of colonial narratives was revealed in the early years of migration to Britain, the bond did not perish. They grieved the loss of a relationship that they came to value under the instruction of a deceptive colonial ideology, but they reorganised and coped with the challenges of settling in an unwelcoming and hostile Britain.

The post-migration loss of a valued relationship to the colonial source was a familiar experience for African-Caribbean migrants indicating that nothing had changed and that patterns in social organisation persisted. The grief process was challenging because they had come to dissociate themselves from a dehumanising history that made references to an assumed backwardness and inferiority. Their identification with the history of slavery was experienced as embarrassing, stigmatising (Goffman, 1990), and a social taboo (Douglas, 2002). Yet, the severing of attachments to Britain was particularly painful because it simultaneously deprived them of access to a part of history through which painful experiences could be reconstructed and asserted. They could not claim their belonging, nor conceptualise their relationships and racialised experience. In this respect, their grief was disenfranchised (Doka, 1989, 2002). Despite rejection and a sense of alienation, Britain was part of African-Caribbean migrants' narrative of belonging. An incommensurate social reality had to be acknowledged to maintain claims to injustice but also assert difference. In this way, they protected their interests and preserved identifications while they moved forward into the future.

A contradictory process of grief defines experiences of African-Caribbean migrants to Britain and their descendants, but it has transformed and changed in relationship to further social developments and evolved identifications. For migrants with colonial background who found themselves in a void unable to step back or move forward, the only option was to grieve with the intention to survive and withstand hardship. They were accustomed to being patient and socialised into a hard work ethic, because a better life remained the reward of striving to become good and deserving British citizens, rather than the realisation of personal and group aspirations in the present.

In addition, they were historically and culturally conditioned to transcend obstacles, withstand and in this way resist dehumanisation and claim their human rights in an evolutionary fashion. Dehumanisation meant that consciousness about racism and oppression and appreciation of the extent of trauma and social inequality could only be realised in stages as people learned to communicate and claim rights to live socially meaningful lives. Struggle never stopped being a central cultural narrative despite colonial identifications because they were left in a constant state of want with unfulfilled expectations. African-Caribbean migrants in Britain were traumatised to have to conceptualise links to the past and reticent to develop ancestral identifications, but they utilised their cultural capital and known strategies of social adaptation to cope with what was familiar in their history and experience - loss.

Grief remained a transhistorical theme within African-Caribbean experiences in the West, although it was expressed differently, its intensity varied, and the discourses and claims changed depending upon the events and circumstances of each historical era. The second generation expressed their sorrow in a more assertive way because they felt entitled to claim their belonging in Britain. They adopted the culture of their parents and even elaborated it with ancestral knowledge and influences that they gained from their interactions with a globalising black diasporic culture in the West. The outcome of interactions was the development of a unique hybrid diasporic identity rather than an essentialist return to roots and origins. In this way, the process of grief transformed relationships to reflect the changed social circumstances and identifications. It did not represent a return to the past but its conceptualisation and identification of meaning in the present. In the process, contemporary narratives gained credibility and value because they were historically and culturally informed and made valid claims in the present, based upon strong arguments that indicated specific future directions.

When grief is intergenerationally transmitted – and in the African-Caribbean case it is because social inclusion never materialised – it becomes part of the community’s cultural narrative, expressive creativity, and social conduct. This means that a culture of grief becomes the frame through which life experiences – especially struggle and loss – are filtered. In a historical perspective the utilisation of grief narratives to interpret current experiences promotes growth and empowerment. As individuals come to terms with the causes of suffering and trauma in their lives through grief and identification with the past, they also become capable of finding ways to cope with the social problems that oppress them. This leads to the acquisition of rights and greater equality and representation within a citizenship framework. Meaninglessness is the stressor that invites meaning reconstruction which leads to growth (Gillies and Neimeyer, 2006). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) claimed that continuing personal distress and growth often coexist and Klass (2013: 600) argued on the basis of research with bereaved parents that most:

*‘...assimilate into their preexisting worldview, change their worldview and evolve in their sense of sorrow. And they continue to do all three in their ongoing lives long after clinicians say that they are done grieving. Most of us are seldom of one minds and states.’*

In the context of a community that experienced grief in a historical timeline rather than a single or multiple lifetimes, grief is culturally defined and contextualised. People are socialised into a perspective that acknowledges the reality of death and loss and considers the temporality of life. Empowerment and growth do not simply replace grief but develop alongside it in an integrative way for as long as sorrow lasts, and until mourners transcend its consequences. The latter does not suggest that grief comes to an end.

This study has revealed experiences of empowerment under conditions of hardship and in challenging personal experiences. First and foremost, the stories that I described take place within a context of financial hardship that according to Klass (2013: 604) - after the Utrecht group (Van der Houwen, et al., 2010) - can result in social loneliness, depression and grief that in turn reproduce social disadvantage. In the African-Caribbean community where marginality and poverty define reality, grief and struggle are ongoing and part of the everyday effort to survive. In this context, I described experiences of tension and conflict in families, internal prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping, victimisation or engagement with crime, tragedy and untimely death, low self-esteem and oppression; all compounded by racism in the wider society and limited opportunities in the economic and political life. In this case, the empowering potential of grief is realised mainly because people have no choice but to accept their social position and promote change. Within a historical framework, this process has been conceptualised, defined, ritualised and integrated into an evolving and hybridising cultural organisation.

Based on this research, we may ask if the mobilisation of resilience through cultural creativity and socially adaptive strategies presents before us a reason to celebrate grief as empowering. Klass (2013) draws our attention to new research directions in the bereavement literature that study the growth processes that accompany loss and trauma, and comments that arguments need to be contextualised to reveal the relatedness of participants' meanings to their social environment and understand their subjective rationalisation. Emphasis upon personal growth represents the continuing influence and evolution of modernist research directions in a postmodern context of celebrated liberalism and relativity. Klass (2013) suggests that we need to exercise caution in celebrating growth without, on the other hand, analysing the courage and stoicism that people practice in the process.

In the African-Caribbean community empowerment is balanced and sustained by an equal measure of grief, and for this reason, research makes contradictory claims. In this context, focus should be transferred upon the ways in which people survive, because it is not a matter of pathology as opposed to empowerment, but a matter of how people subjectively rationalise actions and relationships to promote growth and coping in adversity. African-Caribbean people are aware of their unique ability to understand struggle and loss and develop positively through it. In various degrees, and depending upon the circumstances of each encounter, they are willing to communicate their experience. Senior citizens do not include their slave ancestry in their narratives of grief, but they carry the meanings of survival in their language and vocabulary and express them with reference to their experience of migration in Britain.

The second generation draw links with slavery and communicate their grief in political terms. Either way, grief is a major narrative informing their cultural expression and creativity, because it represents their worldview and existential meanings. Furthermore, the variety of ways in which people behave situationally, denotes the significance and sensitivity of the experience for them. They adjust their behaviour to reflect the depth of understanding that they can reach with their audience. To the outside world it serves them better to give the impression of hardiness and incommensurability, especially when the other party cannot perceive their subjectivity. This is because ignorance and lack of communication exacerbates pain, and it would be futile, counter-productive and would undermine resilience and survival priorities if they opened-up to what could potentially turn into source of misunderstanding. However, if you are willing to accompany one in their journey of suffering and compassionately try to coproduce meanings, people will reveal their vulnerability, courage and stoicism.

Growth features in African-Caribbean experiences, but needs to be empirically grounded, or it will lead to cultural reductionism that runs the risk of pathologising experiences if the element of resilience is missing from analyses. Grief is a necessary element of growth, which does not materialise without stress and conflict in the relationship of the bereaved with society. The idea that grief and growth are intertwined is explained in Klass's (2013) argument that sorrow, sadness and depression are essential in mobilising growth through the process of consolation. Such a function positions loss as instrumental in mobilising social reorganisation. The latter is even more important to people who live in marginality and need to stay vigilant, observe and behave flexibly in transitions to become included.

Growth is achieved in the process of grief's consolation which has a social character. Klass (2013) from a psychological perspective takes into consideration social interactions in processes of consolation, but there is a wide range of social issues that we can deconstruct because the bereaved experience growth as they reposition themselves in society. Here, I will briefly consider adaptive social and cultural processes as consolation and how they interactively work with growth and transformation to reinforce positive social change. In this way, we can more accurately justify and theorise grief's empowerment.

Within a historical framework defined by trauma and inequality, growth represents a process of social repositioning and the adoption of a political stance towards social disadvantage and racism. This is not an instant triumph over injustice or defiance through an optimistic approach to life. Growth represents a process of reorganisation always in relationship to environmental factors, and involves social action, change and development. The process of growth through grief is applied to contexts of social disadvantage to help raise the community's social profile and promote social mobility. Consolation comes from making

steps towards the realisation of identifications and their hybridisation. The process is ongoing, and for this reason, its workings can be described by the dual process model of grief (Stroebe and Schut, 1999). African-Caribbean people always refer to their historical experience of dehumanisation and trauma in order to assess contemporary experiences and relationships and be specific in their claims for equality. This is how they caution others and protect themselves. This is not a resentful strategy that dwells into the past, but as Klass (2013) claimed in relation to sorrow, sadness and depression, it is a realistic and grounded perspective that protects and enables to rebuild life.

Marginality and racialization still define African-Caribbean experiences in Britain, and historical grief with all its cultural variations and elaborations still describes experience. The struggle of grief invites familiarisation with history and the understanding of social organisation and its influence upon relationships and experiences in the present. In this context, people can apply their agency to shape social reality. Lost meaning is reinstated in new understandings and the pursuit of opportunities that enhance equality and cohesion. In this way, loss is gradually inflected and transformed into what gives the impression of growth. However, growth will always include grief which is necessary to sustain the effort needed to realise it. Otherwise, growth loses its meaning, attributes and value.

The communication and negotiation of experiences of loss represents a heuristic function in which African-Caribbean people grieve and grow. Community organisations facilitate related negotiations in meetings - whether they are organised or spontaneous and casual - the recording and publication of first-person accounts, and debates on social issues such as identity and continuing social problems and relationship patterns. The African-Caribbean culture of grief plays an important role in conceptualising these experiences and indicates desirable future outcomes. Occasionally, grief is highlighted by recurring racially motivated



crimes, and loss as a result of injustice and victimisation, as well as annual commemorative events. The theme of grief is the subtext of African-Caribbean meanings articulated and employed to promote social change, because it is constant and the only certainty within their historical experience. This makes grief predictable and manageable in ritual performances, traditions and interactions.

People during their lifetime struggle with the negotiation of inherited life patterns that reflect powerful social stereotypes and expectations. Structural disadvantage and racialization cause African-Caribbean people additional problems in their gender relationships in modern societies. Limitations and shortcomings left unaddressed in earlier negotiations, challenges not included in their socialisation processes, and contemporary social problems and demands require resolution and reflection from people with limited immediate experience in handling loss and disappointment, especially in their early or middle adult life. However, an intensified sense of loss and a culture of grief enable them to manage those challenges effectively, and benefit by the resilience that they cultivate in the process of becoming acquainted with their heritage.

Throughout history African-Caribbean people evolved through the elaboration of earlier narratives as they incorporated their past and heritage to find their place in the present and construct meaning. Due to hardship and loss, transformation and reinvention are rapid, constant, and a way of life. The need to be flexible and adapt to demanding social circumstances leads to the hybridisation of identities. This attribute is conducive to resilience that supports processes of growth due to its persistence, patience and commitment to survival. Hybridity does not represent cultural alienation and distance from ancestral origins but their incorporation and effective utilisation in contemporary meanings. The freedom to

be flexible and adapt to situations may be a source of strain and increase the need to sustain ongoing effort but it is self-serving and functional in contexts of social disadvantage.

In more privileged social backgrounds, responses to loss and experiences of grief of marginalised groups are stereotyped as lacking in emotional depth. According to Strange's (2005) study on the experiences of death and grief among the impoverished working classes in Victorian England, upper class accounts and perspectives that dominated the written record of the time, condemn the hardiness of working-class responses to loss. However, Strange (2005) through a re-reading of historical and literary sources, as well as first-person accounts demonstrates that stoicism in the face of hardship did not deprive people of strong emotions such as sadness and grief. In evaluating African-Caribbean responses to loss and in trying to understand their subjectivity we ought to take similar issues into consideration. On one hand, we need to avoid pathologising experiences and, on the other, we need to avoid celebrating empowerment and optimism. Grief has a central place in adopting a measured response to loss that promotes resilience and social change in circumstances of hardship.

Such theorisations psychologise and label behaviour, and for this reason, fail to consider the context in which experiences take place. Contemporary bereavement research will benefit by diverting attention to the social and historical processes in which growth materialises. Even the concept of resilience, which I have theorised as a product of hybridity, is particularly prone to reification, when in actual fact it simply develops out of the need to persevere and involves intensive effort to transmute and survive within a context of social struggle, loss and grief. Resilience according to the Jungian psychologist Estés (1992[2008]) is like scar tissue, which is thicker, stronger and more difficult to penetrate. It represents long-term interactions with grief and needs to be analysed contextually.

## **Bereavement and growth**

In this thesis, I drew a distinction between grief and bereavement. The former refers to the intense pain of separation and/or the realisation of the meaning of relationship to the deceased in any given context. The latter refers to the post-loss process of social reorganisation. Specifically, I argued that grief provides the incentive to reorganisation materialised within the process of bereavement. Stress resulting from death's disturbance to existential security invites meaning reconstruction that develops and alters existing frameworks to include social considerations raised by the experience of loss.

In the African-Caribbean case historical processes of racialization and stereotyping gain renewed significance by the realisation of their continuing influence in the present. Loss indicates to the bereaved that social disadvantage is still part of their experience in Britain because problems of readjustment to death are attributed to wider social issues, which they bring to attention. Identification with the past is helpful because lessons from the past collected and formulated within a cultural heritage provide guidance on what needs redefinition. Culture and tradition also suggest ways in which transformation can be accomplished more effectively. Although death is seldom the direct outcome of inequality – in some cases this connection can be drawn more directly – social issues feature prominently in processes of adaptation to loss, and for this reason, social organisation ought to take central stage in theorisations of bereavement.

If we define growth as the effective incorporation of knowledge gained in life experiences into existing individual and cultural frameworks, we need to also evaluate the role of gender organisation and its intersections with race and racism. In this thesis, I demonstrated that both African-Caribbean men and women were historically oppressed, dehumanised and

stereotyped. However, within structural frameworks privileging notions of hegemonic heteronormativity, constructs of gender identity intersect with definitions of race and construct unique experiences for oppressed black men and women. African-Caribbean men, influenced by a popular masculinist ideology, identified with hegemonic ideals which they subordinated. History points to tense and competitive interpersonal relationships in unequal contexts and adverse circumstances, and academic constructions often simplistically pathologise black family organisation. However, if we focus our gaze upon social organisation rather than its expressions and impacts, we will reflexively describe diverse subjectivities and localised rationalisations, including our own, which is influenced by Western and modernist norms and values.

Should we fail to do so, we are actively playing a role in the perpetuation of experiences that constructed African-Caribbean women invisible and vulnerable in the context of intensified productive and reproductive labour responsibilities. The latter may have become a survival strategy that works, but it is not sustainable, neither is it conducive to radical social change. History has repeated itself numerous times during which progress was made. However, we have reached the point where we may ask how can obstacles be transcended? How can we move into a more discursive and relational mode of identification 'through' and 'with' difference? The latter is not an invitation to postmodern relativism, but serves to assert unique subjectivities and even examine the incommensurability of competing accounts that claim ownership of the same cultural and geographical space. It involves a reminder that communities are imagined (Anderson, 1991). Experiences of death, dying, grief and loss present unique opportunities for the creation of 'new' communities with compassion and understanding for the pain of the 'other'.

It should not matter whether men strive for recognition within a cultural framework of support and survival with communitarian basis, or whether women gain agency which they invest back into the community to strengthen prospects of survival. What matters is that these relationships are symptoms of wider social structures of inequality. These subjectivities need to be asserted and communicated to promote understanding and transformational action. Their purpose is not to psychologise, pathologise or reify cultural experiences to enable scientific explanation. This is another form of power and control that does not serve purposes of a public facing sociology (Burawoy, 2005) with involvement, engagement and direct reference, impact and relevance to peoples' experiences and social life.

For this reason, provisionally and very tentatively, I make the following reflections on African-Caribbean men's experiences of bereavement:

- a) Social exclusion and denied access to a framework of hegemonic masculinity is compensated for by leadership in communitarian politics that guarantee remembrance beyond physical death and connection to ancestry (ancestral bonds).
- b) Deviance despite its associations with precarity and short-life expectancy carries associations with a higher level of justice in dehumanising circumstances, although it is not condoned by African-Caribbean communities.
- c) Consolation is found in creatively developing individual identifications that protect, inspire, empower and create new prospects for the individual and subsequent generations.

The following reflections can be made on African-Caribbean women's experiences of bereavement:

- a) Loss of significant relationships is compensated for in activities that reflect the relationship that they once shared with the deceased and allowed the continuation of their conversations/relationship in everyday life (continuing bonds).
- b) Intensified labour in the context of precarious lives involves taking on additional care responsibilities and investing effort beyond what may be expected or even humanely possible because it can save lives.
- c) In Western societies, meritocracy, communicate care systems and civil society can be employed in pursuing a vocation while deconstructing the character of the deceased and being inspired by their life and example. The above will culminate into transformational change for the self and others.

With the above bereavement attributes in mind, we may become enticed to celebrate an observed ability to promote survival amidst major loss and despite hardship. It is equally intriguing - at the expense of becoming enmeshed in culturally elaborated attractions - to prioritise an atheoretical focus upon ritualistic practices within which growth and resilience are cultivated and find expression. We need to remember that resilience always requires a hard work ethic and struggle, and as Klass (2013) contends growth represents transcendence of boundaries and limitations. It means that the bereaved can find fulfilment in grief and rise above the loss by applying a holistic and philosophical approach to life. As Klass's bereaved parents and my participants testified if they could turn the clock back, they would choose not to go through loss and suffering. As Fred argued 'life does not have to be that hard', adding the dimensions of race and gender identity to his experience of bereavement.

The celebratory empowerment hypothesis may apply to a small number of cases where a profound humanitarian cause was served. For everyone else, it is important and meaningful to create a positive social legacy for the African-Caribbean community and bereavement

was paramount to this process. Some had more choices than others due to their social status, age and gender. For example, those with few close attachments could be very creative with their identifications, which reflect upon their career choices and the projects they undertake. But we need to remain vigilant and conscious of the fact that this kind of readjustment was the result of hardship, and there are limits to what most people can afford to change, meaning that social exclusion and disadvantage is very much still lived reality.

From a sociological perspective, the relationship with the deceased, however reflective of social relationships, interactions, structures and cultures, may invite more or less processes of adaptation and repositioning during bereavement. This will necessarily impact upon the bereaved person's identifications, and in this thesis, a number of possible scenarios were outlined creating a typology that could provide guidance for further research on the subject. What matters, however, is that we now have the awareness and knowledge that individuals and their cultures are not 'naturally' and 'essentially' adaptive or 'tolerant' and 'resilient' to hardship. Instead, cultures and attitudes emerge out of conditions which are structurally, historically and intergenerationally defined. Although people can and do resist and behave adaptively there is a lot that we can do from 'above' and 'below' to support health and wellbeing during bereavement. We should not be waiting for isolated moments when vulnerability is highlighted to act. Within a framework that includes and normalises death, dying, loss, bereavement and caring, we should be proactive at supporting end-of-life care experiences in everyday life and ordinary interactions. In this way, social disadvantage may be alleviated and replaced by widespread social cohesion, empathy, equality, inclusion and diversity.

It is important to note that African-Caribbean heritage communities in the UK promote health, wellbeing, compassion and social inclusion in grassroots frameworks of social

organisation. End-of-life care provides crucial opportunities for promoting those principles and features as organisational component of daily life. Death rituals can more effectively be seen in this light rather than for their intrinsic qualities for which they have attracted disproportionate attention. Religious organisation as well as support frameworks for the frail and elderly bring together civil society and identified but neglected need through the act of 'outreach'. However, how far can these acts of compassion and informal community care be stretched without significant cost for human life related experiences of which were described in this thesis?

There is urgent need to move beyond the point where life for historically marginalised populations is 'vulnerable', 'in crisis', 'struggling' or 'precarious'. There are important theoretical and philosophical lessons to be learned from related experiences with the power to alter our approach to studying grief and bereavement. However, our conceptualisation and understanding of bereavement is reactive to the environments in which it is lived and experienced and its academic constructions should not become key ethical imperative. In this respect, we should strive for representation and inclusion. This is even more important when it comes to marginal and socially disadvantaged communities because their encounters with loss are multifaceted and intensified.

In today's societies we promote policies that support health and wellbeing, as well as greater equality through fairness and equality in the distribution of material resources. The question that I will now turn to consider in the conclusion of this thesis is 'how may we go about promoting social inclusion and wellbeing through greater visibility and representation of informal and grassroots form of community organisation for the end of life?' Drawing upon African-Caribbean experiences in Britain, I will discuss the possibilities and limitations of a public health approach to end-of-life care.



## Conclusion

The sociological problem studied in this thesis challenges accepted ways of understanding loss and bereavement in academia, and indicates the importance of social organisation, death education and communication, and care networks and partnerships in dealing with experiences of loss. I started by reviewing the literature to identify unique patterns in the bereavement experiences of forcibly dislocated and traumatised diasporas. There has been considerable effort to identify the issues complicating bereavement experiences, but the problem has not been clearly defined. There are copious efforts to reveal the intensity of loss experienced by people who have lost more in life than just loved ones to death. Their psychology is conditioned by the complexity of understandings of loss, and they experience additional problems in the process of coming to terms with the experience. This is because they struggle to understand the meaning of pervasive loss in life, and to find purpose in new social roles. However, the studies reviewed in chapter 1 focus upon early traumatic reactions to loss and fail to examine the social issues involved in bereavement processes.

In this thesis, I argue that bereavement is more than the pain of grief complicated by dispossession, historical loss and social inequalities. Bereavement takes place within social contexts and relationships, and unless we pay attention to the micro interactions and social organisation that shape these experiences, we will not be able to explain them. Difficulty in finding meaning in pervasive loss is attributed to the disenfranchisement and lack of inter-subjective communication with the wider society and within marginal communities about the issues that perplex and complicate grief. Bereavement is the process in which people negotiate social experiences that have major and sometimes structural impact upon their psychosocial lives.

In the current research my aim was to find out if and how different experiences of loss interact. More specifically, I was interested in evaluating the impact of traumatic dispossession upon bereavement. Providing answers to these theoretical problems would enable me to access the social and cultural settings and historical contexts that underwrite, and therefore, define bereavement processes and outcomes. In this way, I was able to describe the special social issues that bereaved African-Caribbean people deconstruct during bereavement and how they go about identifying likely directions in the process of their social readjustment to loss. Awareness of these issues helps us to better understand their needs as community members, and as members of the wider society. Multiculturalism without such in-depth sociological explanation leads to cultural reductionism, and inadequate and misleading conclusions that fail to promote social cohesion and inclusion of minorities and their cultures.

Furthermore, the understanding of subjective perspectives and experiences is beneficial to whole communities in postmodern societies, characterised by reflexivity, interrelatedness, and diversity of experience. If we are to benefit from the full range of opportunities that postmodern social organisation offers, then everyone needs to benefit. This is especially the case where there has been oppression when different groups came into contact at some point or throughout history because their identity depends upon the other. Loss cannot be contextualised, understood and related to lived experience without meaningful intersubjective communication. Besides, the flexible networks and soft partnerships that create the fabric of contemporary societies and inspire social identities characterised by multiplicity depend upon tolerance and compassion shared and communicated between citizens. Globalization and openness promote interdependency and can only be realised in cooperative and cohesive societies. If key issues such as death and loss that define everyone's life, but especially the lives of marginal, oppressed and disenfranchised

communities are not communicated in interpersonal and organisational relationships, they will remain socially excluded while societies will not benefit by opening-up their options and diversifying their own identities. For this reason, it is imperative to incorporate those lessons into policy, practice and social organisation.

For this reason, I conclude this thesis by proposing a way forward that will enable us as social beings and citizens to become better at dealing with loss and at accommodating the needs of people whose social disadvantage undermines their opportunities, but also drive their empowerment and active participation in social change. While we all have the responsibility to care for vulnerable groups and communities, we can, at the same time, gain a lesson in health literacy while becoming acquainted with their experiences, cultures and processes of adaptation to loss. It has been evidenced that social isolation and exclusion presents major risks to life, and this is not exclusive of the end of life (Kellehear, 2005). Greater intersubjective communication and meaningful conceptualisation of our interdependence will, therefore, benefit everyone. Such an ideal may well be supported in post-structuralist societies connected at ideological level, transcending the structural limitations of advanced or late modernity.

Before I elaborate upon my concluding argument, I would like to reiterate the main sociological findings of this research, and its contribution to our understanding of bereavement as a social process. This will enable me to talk about specific social problems and issues in my attempt to provide a framework for incorporating grief and loss in society, and in my effort to propose ways in which we can organise around this natural experience, which is originally meant to promote growth.

The current thesis studied the relationship between different types of loss in the lives of people who identify with traumatic loss and dispossession in the diaspora, and who are now experiencing grief for the death of an important person in their lives. Interview data indicated that participants experienced pervasive loss in their lives and struggled in disadvantage. Their bereavement processes were empowering, but at the same time, compounded by social complexity and lack of a safe cultural location. The issues that they came to terms with to transform and improve their lives during their post-loss adaptation required complex conceptualisation of social relationships and structures, the meaning of which the wider society does not openly communicate or understand. For this reason, African-Caribbean communities have developed cultural processes of dealing with loss that prescribe acceptance, usually expressed in artistic creativity and cultural practices. As part of the same historical cultural traditions, African-Caribbean people also organise into communities of care and support that operate through local, national and transnational networks.

This cultural turn towards loss occurred as people negotiated the meaning of their experiences within a lifelong journey that defined their identities. Social change and inclusion were outcomes of their interactions with loss. Within pre-defined structural relationships, African-Caribbean men and women follow certain bereavement processes that vary within contextual circumstances. Despite being able to grow in experiences of loss and find ways to inflect a negative experience, it requires an enormous amount of energy to process an event that needs to be accepted and incorporated into a life narrative. Although we all have to face it, in some cases the experience is intensified and/or compounded and it takes a substantial amount of searching and questioning before one is able to say:

*'You know what makes me understand? That we all have to die'*

(John)

As Fred asserted 'it does not have to be that hard in life' and society owes it to its vulnerable members, and to its philosophical commitment to democratic civic participation to care for and actively engage marginalised populations.

Towards the end of promoting health, wealth and wellbeing for all we need to take experiences of loss into consideration and incorporate them into our ways of understanding and relating to others in society. In this way, needs will be accommodated and there will be greater acceptance, and positive and productive response to difference. Loss and marginality are reasons for which people become socially excluded but understanding of difference and communication of marginal experiences will be profitable for societies, contrary to perceived wisdom informed by fear. Kellehear (2005) argued that societies can accommodate difference when people relate to one another with compassion. Compassion means to withstand and be patient with the suffering of another. It is an attitude and a shared journey based upon reciprocity, mutuality and emphatic understanding of subjective experience. It is quite different to 'care', which means to 'grieve' and show sorrow to the suffering of another. Compassion goes further than care in that it involves social and long-term partnerships set up to ease and accommodate suffering (Kellehear, 2005: 41-42).

The practice of compassion is central in accommodating the needs of communities that have experienced pervasive loss in their historical past, and their social lives are conditioned by these circumstances. When communities are disenfranchised, their loss is not recognised by the wider society, and for this reason, they are more likely to remain excluded from opportunities and full participation in social life. This is the place of 'liminality' or 'social death' that historically defined social experiences in African-Caribbean heritage communities. Loss for African-Caribbean people in Britain is a psychological experience

only because they grieve the loss of social relationships and lack of access to networks that sustain their health and wellbeing. Lack of opportunities and loss may have an impact upon morbidity and mortality, and all these issues need to be meticulously researched to build a valid profile that will inform policy and practice design. Social status, social isolation, lack of cohesion and racism have all been found to impact upon health (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). Such considerations will apply to bereavement and end-of-life care and ought to be fully explored.

There is nothing to suggest that there is pathology within African-Caribbean communities following examination of several bereavement narratives. In contrast, there is resilience and cultural practices that sustain people in transitions. Bereavement is compounded due to lack of social supports and opportunities, as well as tense and competitive relationships that reflect wider social structures and precarious identities. In this context, bereavement is treated as an opportunity to assess the complexity of social issues and promote social change within processes of consolation and compassionate understanding. In this way, bereavement is positioned within a wider discourse in which loss constitutes central narrative because it is conducive to growth and social transformation. However, social disadvantage can and does limit acts of compassion. This is when grief becomes compounded, and intensified suffering ensues among people who are socially excluded. Such circumstances of vulnerability prove unsustainable and have significant health and wellbeing implications.

For this reason, it is imperative to reposition grief and bereavement in marginal communities within a wider end-of-life care framework. If different experiences of loss are linked and cause grief cumulatively, how can societies support interrelatedness to ease suffering? Kellehear (1998, 2005) proposes a wider definition of end-of-life care, one that includes death, dying, bereavement, caring and all experiences of loss. Effectively, we are all

preoccupied with existential questions and even when we are not directly affected by end-of-life care concerns in the present, we can still provide informal support and compassionate care in the community towards experiences that are universal. Such an approach to end-of-life care in the community is compatible with existing supportive practices in African-Caribbean communities evidenced by this research and has the potential to enhance their importance and preventive functions. It simultaneously builds rapport and inter-subjective communication in diverse contexts while promoting equitable distribution of care in cohesive societies. Complex experiences of loss with social dimensions can be represented within naturalistic contexts of care. Communication, understanding and timely response can serve purposes of inclusion.

*Compassionate Communities* are communities that accommodate experiences of loss and create opportunities for their communication and effective consolation. They establish networks and partnerships that involve public institutions, voluntary groups and grassroots communities, and promote widespread death education and awareness. Through befriending, networking and community engagement activities, *Compassionate Communities* find ways to support the end of life and its care in naturalistic settings. The proposed framework communicates health-promoting ideas inspired by the World Health Organisation (WHO) 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. The public health framework known as *Healthy Cities* is being extended to include the end of life and its care under the premise that health does not imply the absence of disease, life-limiting illness, mortality, loss and caring (Kellehear, 2005).

African-Caribbean experiences of bereavement provide a suitable case that can be used to profitably incorporate bereavement and loss caused by dispossession within the *Compassionate Cities* framework. African-Caribbean people have interacted with loss long

enough to be able to effectively respond to the experience. In this sense, they can be a paradigmatic example employed in death education. At the same time, social networks will provide new avenues and opportunities to these marginal communities who will be able to express their subjectivity and utilise it in society productively. In this way, they will find new social roles; they will escape social exclusion and liminality and will feel fully incorporated into social life. The following list outlines key features of *Compassionate Communities*, which can be profitably employed to change attitudes towards bereavement.

According to Kellehear (2005: 46) a *Compassionate City*:

1. Has local health policies that recognize compassion as an ethical imperative
2. Meets the special needs of its aged, those living with life-threatening illness and those living with loss
3. Has a strong commitment to social and cultural difference
4. Involves the grief and palliative care services in local government policy and planning
5. Offers its inhabitants access to a wide variety of supportive experiences, interactions and communication
6. Promotes and celebrates reconciliation with indigenous peoples and the memory of other important community losses
7. Provides easy access to grief and palliative care services
8. Has a recognition of and plans to accommodate those disadvantaged by the economy, including rural and remote populations, indigenous people and the homeless
9. Preserves and promotes a community's spiritual traditions and storytellers

African-Caribbean communities are already equipped with the infrastructure needed to develop this public health framework. African-Caribbean communities are already



compassionate communities that internally articulate notions of loss and practice care for end-of-life experiences. Cultural traditions and philosophical understandings are tailored to accommodate end-of-life care needs, and it is within these frameworks that such relationships are practiced. However, there is lack of meaningful communication and empathic understanding about the way in which the end of life and its care is experienced in marginality. There is also underutilisation of formal end-of-life care services among ethnic minorities in Britain according to palliative and bereavement care services reports to the author of this thesis.

People that participated in this research trust healthcare and welfare services. They have established community organisations that create partnerships with local councils to promote collaboration between the community and governmental, with the aim to improve health and welfare/public service provision and contribute to equitable civic participation. However, when it comes to death, dying and loss some of that communication and exchange fails. Given the impact of social isolation, exclusion and loss upon health, greater wellbeing will for all not be promoted unless related experiences are communicated openly and represented in inclusive care practices.

To achieve this end, we need a seamless end-of-life care approach. This would involve education about experiences of loss in African-Caribbean heritage and other marginalised communities in Britain. It would involve a historical re-evaluation and collective reconstruction of meaning, in a way that reconciliation can be achieved, and mutual aims and priorities can be set. The wider community needs to accommodate the needs and listen to the stories of African-Caribbean people and consider their own perspectives reflexively. On the other hand, African-Caribbean people need to offer their experiences and communicate them without fear that they will experience further loss. The wider community

needs to make African-Caribbean people feel comfortable to express their subjective experiences and make a commitment to accommodate their needs.

This can be achieved through story-telling, sharing of personal experience within networks, organisations, services, fundraising events, fiestas, rituals and educational discussions. All these interactions are already taking place, but there needs to be a change of attitudes towards purposeful communication of experiences of loss and vulnerability. Within a cohesive social environment people will experience better health and wellbeing and they will enjoy a variety of opportunities in social participation. In this way, we can claim that we have reached the full potential of reflexive modernity, where social categories matter for the multiplicity and enhancement to our lifestyles that they contribute. Until this is achieved, traditional social categories will remain relevant and will shape our reality. A participatory approach to end-of-life care issues has the potential to transform our social realities and enhance existing directions towards equality, diversity and inclusivity.

### **Future research directions**

Considering the theoretical findings of the current research and the policy implications discussed in the conclusion, I can suggest 4 future research directions:

1. Effort must be placed into the analysis of the meaning of loss in diasporic communities in conjunction with their health and socio-economic profile. Any effort to include minorities and diasporic communities must take into consideration their understandings and experiences of loss, and how these impact upon health and wellbeing. In this way, particular health and social issues can be targeted by policy design, and appropriate approaches that aim towards social inclusion can be adopted.

2. In this context, it is imperative to include loss in communications with African-Caribbean communities, without, on the other hand, stereotyping or pathologising experiences. Loss is normalised in African-Caribbean cultures, and it is functional to social life. Its communication can potentially aid the larger society and provide death education to the rest of the community. At the same time, African-Caribbean people will feel included in relationships and interactions that do not compromise their cultural integrity and acknowledge and represent experiences of loss. Postmodern choice does not represent the opposite of heritage and tradition. Freedom and diversity presuppose the recognition of loss with firm foundations in past heritage and traditions. We need to acknowledge the socially constructed nature of experience and utilise the past to promote a more humanitarian and open approach to difference in postmodern societies. In this context, the past and traditions will survive within reflexive attitudes and identities.
3. This research provided the basis to our understanding of loss and bereavement in African-Caribbean communities. As a result, descriptions of loss, social problems and disadvantage feature prominently in the data considered. However, experiences of transformation were equally identified as possible outcomes of negotiations of loss. Within a research environment in which little is known and understood, I had to start from the beginning and try to deconstruct the source of suffering. Therefore, more research needs to be carried out to fully investigate the positive and creative experiences of loss in postmodern societies, and how these relate to the understandings and negotiations of past experiences of loss. These studies will benefit by the examination of experiences among young African-Caribbean people. Their effective incorporation of loss into popular philosophical and existential paradigms expressed in hybrid identifications will be able to indicate how best to use

loss in death education, and the possible directions that social and attitude change could take if loss is to be utilised in negotiations of experience and social reality.

4. The study of loss requires the employment of multiple methods of data collection and heuristic use of social theory to aid interpretation. The application of theories to research findings depends upon contextual circumstances and characteristics, rather than the strength of those theoretical insights or methodological practices. There is a complex interplay between past, present and future in any experience or interaction that involves loss that impacts upon the appropriateness of research methods and theoretical frameworks. The interrelationships between different types of loss must also be studied because they define cultural understandings and peoples' responses to loss. Any theory could, therefore, be conducive to understanding, if, social organisation is fully analysed. Studies of race and bereavement have focused upon particular social problems and made these central in the development of their theories. Attention should rather be diverted upon the analysis of social organisation in which social problems manifest as the outcome of the interaction between multiple contextual variables.
5. Bereavement research needs to be systematised to inform public health policy and practice. Experiences of bereavement in different and diverse populations in society need to be portrayed to raise awareness about their unique needs and vulnerabilities. In African-Caribbean communities racialised experiences and social inequality feature prominently in bereavement processes and directions. Within the larger society and diverse groupings and communities, other social factors may be relevant. Whatever it is that defines the social transition undertaken during bereavement, it will be a prominent feature constructing identity and culture. In postmodern societies there is greater diversity of experience. However, loss represents a journey through memory and the past. Postmodern relativism provides a unique opportunity for the

assertion of experiences of loss and grief and carries potential for the promotion of cohesion and wellbeing for all citizens beyond conflict and historical trauma.

Within a public health end-of-life care policy framework, we will be able as communities to compassionately care for the needs of all bereaved people. We will be able to consider multiple bereavement issues and processes and accommodate localised and individual needs. In addition, recognition and open communication about loss will cultivate relationships of compassion and will create extra opportunities and processes of consolation. Death represents worldly inevitability, and society's effective response to the disruption that it causes will serve to normalise the experience. It will also organise social life around the experience and enable communities and groups of people to assert their difference and subjectivity in a relational manner. This will prevent social exclusion and enhance reflexivity and postmodern multiplicity without compromising tradition, history, and culture.

Finally, and most importantly, it is imperative to coordinate research on bereavement aiming for greater visibility and representation of experiences of loss in society. Sociology needs to distance itself from psychology and the preoccupation with the harm that loss inflicts upon the bereaved. We need to systematise research and organise efforts to design policies that will promote social change and accommodate loss. We need to map experiences of loss in society, and clearly communicate impacts, needs and priorities. This research set the problem and studied one experience. More research needs to be carried out to allow such a direction in bereavement theory, policy, and practice to proliferate.

## References

Abercrombie, N., Hill, S. and Turner, B.S. (2006) *Dictionary of Sociology*. Fifth Edition. London, Penguin Reference.

Adelman, A. (1995) Traumatic memory and the intergenerational transmission of Holocaust narratives. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Vol. 50: 343-367.

Alcock, P. (2010) Building the Big Society: A new policy environment for the third sector in England. *Voluntary Sector Review*, Vol. 1(3): 379-389.

Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Capitalism*. London, Verso Books.

Angelou, M. (1995) *Maya Angelou: The Complete Collected Poems*. London, Virago Press.

Angelou, M. (2005) *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*. London, Virago Press.

Angelou, M. (2011) *Love's Exquisite Freedom*. Welcome Enterprises.

Arnold, E. (2006) Separation and loss through migration of African Caribbean women to the UK. *Attachment and Human Development*, Vol. 8(2): 159-174.

- Atkin, K. & Rollings, J. (1992) Informal care in Asian and Afro/Caribbean communities: A literature review. *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 22: 405-418.
- Averill, J R. (1968) Grief: Its nature and significance. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 70: 721-48.
- Banton, M. (1991) The race relations problematic. *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 42(1): 115-130.
- Barrett, R.K. (1998) Sociocultural considerations for working with Blacks experiencing loss and grief. In K.J Doka & J.D. Davidson (Ed/s.) *Living with Grief: Who We Are, How We Grieve*. New York: Routledge.
- Barrett, R. & Heller, K.S. (2002) Death and dying in the Black experience. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Vol. 5(5): 793-799.
- Barthes, R. (1989) *The Rustle of Language*. Translated by Richard Howard. California, University of California Press.
- Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens Association [BEMSCA] (2009) *Life Journeys: Life Writing from members of Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens Association*. Bath: BEMSCA.
- BBC Home (2008) 'London: London celebrates 60 years since the arrival of MV Empire Windrush'. *BBC Home*, June 2008. Available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2008/06/19/windrush\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2008/06/19/windrush_feature.shtml). Accessed 2 March 2012.

- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: SAGE.
- Beckles, H. (1995) Sex and gender in the historiography of Caribbean slavery. In V.A Shepherd, B. Brereton, & Bailey, B.E. (Ed/s.) *Engendering History: Caribbean Writers in Historical Perspective*. London, St. Martin's Press.
- Beckles, H. (1999) *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Society*. Kingston and Princeton, I. Randle.
- Beckles, H. (2004) Black masculinity in Caribbean slavery. In R.E. Reddock (Ed/s) *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. Kingston, The University of the West Indies Press.
- Berjoff, J. (2003) Psychodynamic theories of grief and bereavement. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, Vol. 73 (3): 273-298.
- Berthood, R. (2000) *Family Formation in Multi-Cultural Britain: Three Patterns of Diversity*. Institute for Economic and Social Research, Essex, University of Essex.
- Bhabha, H.K. (1984) Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. *October*, Vol. 28 (Discipleship: A special issue on Psychoanalysis): 125-133.
- Bhabha, H.K. (1990) The third space: interview with Homi Bhabha. In J. Rutherford, (Ed/s.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.



- Black, M.L. (1995) My mother never fathered me: Reithinking kinship and the governing of families. *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 44(1): 49-71.
- Bolling, J.L. (1995) Guinea across the water: The African-American approach to death and dying. In J.K. Parry & A.S. Ryan (Ed/s.) *A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying, and Religion*. USA: Wadsworth Publications.
- Bonanno, G.A. (2004) Loss, trauma and human resilience: have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events? *American Psychologist*, Vol. 59(1): 20-28.
- Bourdieu, P. (1972) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1980) *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Bowen, M. (1976) Family reaction to death. In P. Guerin (Ed.) *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*. New York: Gardner Press.
- Bowlby, J. (1971a) *Attachment and Loss (Vol. I): Attachment*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Bowlby, J. (1971b) *Attachment and Loss (Vol. II): Separation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Bowlby, J. (1979) *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London: Tavistock.

Bowlby, J. (1981) *Attachment and Loss (Vol. III): Loss: sadness and depression*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Bradbury, M. (1999) *Representations of Death: a social and psychological perspective*. London: Routledge.

Brown, V. (2008) *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. USA: Harvard University Press.

Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods*. Third Edition. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Burke, L.A., Neimeyer, R.A. & McDevitt-Murphy, M.E. (2010) African American homicide bereavement: Aspects of social support that predict complicated grief, PTSD, and depression. *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 61(1): 1-24.

Bush-Slimani, B. (1993) Hard labour: Women, childbirth and resistance in British Caribbean societies. *History Workshop*, Vol. 86: 83-99.

Burawoy, M. (2005) For Public Sociology. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 70(1):  
[doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000102](https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000102)

Butler, R.N. (1963) The life review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged. *Psychiatry*, Vol. 26: 65-76.

Camber, R. (2011) Pictured: The 'gangsta' gunman whose death sparked riots. *Mail Online*, 5 August. Available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2022670/The-gangsta-gunman-death-sparked-riots.html>. Accessed 30 March 2013.

Cannon, A., 1989. The historical dimension in mortuary expressions of status and sentiment. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 30, 437-457.

Carby, H.V. (1989) *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Carroll, R. & Prickett, S. (2008) *The Bible: Authorised King James Version*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Chakraborty, A. & McKenzie, K. (2002) Does racial discrimination cause mental illness? *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 180: 475-477.

Cheng, A.A. (2001) *The Melancholy of Race*. London: Oxford University Press.

Childe, V. G. (1945). Directional Changes in Funerary Practice During 50,000 Years. *Man* Vol. 45: 13-19.

Christian, B. (1985) *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York, Pergamon Press.

Clark, K.B. & Clark, M.P. (1950) Emotional factors in racial identification and preference in negro children. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 19(3): 341-350.

Clifford, J. (1994) 'Diasporas'. *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9(3): 302-338.

Cohen, R. (1997) *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Craib, I. (1997) *Classical Social Theory: An Introduction to the Thought of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Craton, M. (1988) Continuity not change: the incidence of unrest among ex-slaves in the British West Indies, 1838-1976. *Abolition and Slavery: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, Vol. 9(2): 144-170.

Craton, M. (1997) *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean*. Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.

Craton, M., Walvin, J. & Wright, D. (1976) *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*. London, Longman.

Curtin, P.D. (1968) Epidemiology and the slave trade. *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 83(2): 190-216.

Danieli, Y. (1988) Treating survivors and children of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. In Ochsberg, F.M. (Ed.) *Post-Traumatic Therapy and Victims of Violence*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

David, P. (2003) Issues of death and dying for adult children of Holocaust survivors. Presentation to Council on Social Work Education: *2003 National Gerontological Social Work Conference*. Available at [www.inter-disciplinary.org/mso/dd/dd2/david%20paper.pdf](http://www.inter-disciplinary.org/mso/dd/dd2/david%20paper.pdf). Accessed 12 June 2008.

Davidson, J.O. & Layder, D. (1994) *Methods, Sex and Madness*. London, Rourledge.

Denham, A.R. (2008) Rethinking historical trauma: Narratives of resilience. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, Vol. 45(3): 391-414.

Dennis, R. M. (1997) Introduction: W.E.B. DuBois and the tradition of radical intellectual thought' in Rutledge M. Dennis (ed.) *Research in Race and Ethnic Relations Vol.10: The Black Intellectuals*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Denzin, N. (1970) *The Research Act*. Chicago, Aldine.

Derrida, J. (1989) *Memoirs for Paul de Man*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dikotter, F. (1992) *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*. London, Hurst & Co.

Doka, K. (1989) *Disenfranchised Grief: recognizing hidden sorrow*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Doka, K.J. (2002) *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice*. Campaign, IL: Research Press.

Doka, K.J. & Martin, T.L. (2010) *Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the Ways Men and Women Mourn*. Revised Edition, New York, Routledge.

Douglas, M. (2002) *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge.

Douglass, F. (2004) *My Bondage and my Freedom*. The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Drescher, S. (1992) The ending of the slave trade and the evolution of European scientific racism. In J.F. Inikori, L. Stanley & L. Engerman (Ed/s.) *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies and Peoples in Africa, the Americas and Europe*. Duke University Press.

Dresser, M. (1986) *Black and White on the Buses*. Bristol, Pressgang Co-operative Ltd.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903) *The Talented Tenth*. New York, James Pott and Company.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (2011) *The Souls of Black Folk*. Tribeca Books.

Durkheim, E. (1947[2010]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, a Study in Religious Sociology*. General Books.

Eisenbruch, M. (1984a) Cross-cultural aspects of bereavement I: a conceptual framework for comparative analysis. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, Vol. 8(3): 283-309.

Eisenbruch, M. (1984b) Cross-cultural aspects of bereavement II: ethnic and cultural variations in the development of bereavement practices. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, Vol. 8(4): 315-347.

Elkins, S. (1976) *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*. University of Chicago Press.

Ellis, R.T. & Granger, J.M. (2002) African American adults' perceptions of the effects of parental loss during adolescence. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, Vol. 19(4): 271-284.

Eltis, D. (1993) Europeans and the rise and fall of African slavery in the Americas: An interpretation. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 98(5): 1399-1423.

Emecheta, B. (1980) *Joys of Motherhood*. Brasiller Books.

Eng, D.L. (2000) Melancholia in the Late Twentieth Century. *Signs*, Vol. 25(4): 1275-1281.

Eng, D.L. & Han, S. (2003) A dialogue on racial melancholia. In D.L. Eng & D. Kazanjian, (Ed/s.) *Loss*. California: University of California Press.

Eng, D.L. & Kazanjian, D (2003) *Loss*. California: University of California Press.

Engel, G.I. (1961) Is grief a disease? *Psychosomatic Medicine*, Vol. 23: 18-22.

English, R. (2009) Race doll row hits the royals: Queen has to say sorry for golliwogs on sale at Sandringham. *The Daily Mail*. Available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1135931/Race-doll-row-hits-royals-Queen-say-sorry-golliwogs-sale-Sandringham.html>. Accessed 20 May 2013.

Epstein, H. (1980) *Children of the Holocaust*. New York: Bantam Books.

Estés, C.P. (1992[2008]) *Women who Run with the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*. Rider.

Evans, M. (1984) *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*. Anchor Books.

Fachingbauer, T.R., Devaul, R.A. & Zisook, S. (1977) Development of the Texas inventory of grief. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 134: 696-698.

Fanon, F. (2006a) Racism and Culture. In A. Haddour (Ed.) *The Fanon Reader*. London: Pluto Press.

Fanon, F. (2006b) The Negro and language. In A. Haddour (Ed.) *The Fanon Reader*. London: Pluto Press.

Fanon, F. (2008[1952]) *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press.



Feldhay Brenner, R. (2005) How to mend love? Wrestling with the legacy of the Holocaust in recent Israeli fiction. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, Vol. 4(1): 81-100.

Fenton, S. (1999) *Ethnicity: Racism, Class and Culture*. London: Macmillan Press.

Ferenda, L. (2011) Mark Duggan Buried, *The Online Society*, 10 September 2011.

Available from <http://theonlinesociety.com/2011/09/mark-duggan-buried/>. Accessed 31 March 2013.

Field, D., Hockey, J. & Small, N. (1997) *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge.

Field, N. (2006). Unresolved loss and maladaptive continuing bonds expressions. *Death Studies*, Vol. 30: 739–756.

Firth, S. (1996) The good death: Attitudes of British Hindus. In G. Howarth and P. Jupp, (Ed/s.) *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Death, Dying and Disposal*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Firth, S. (1997) Hindu death and mourning rituals: The impact of geographic mobility. In J. Hockey, J. Katz and N. Small (Ed/s.) *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Firth, S. (2000a) Approaches to death in Hindu and Sikh communities in Britain. In D. Dickenson, M. Johnson and J.S. Katz (Ed.s) *Death, Dying and Bereavement*. London: SAGE Publications.

Firth, S. (2000b) Cross-cultural perspectives on bereavement. In D. Dickenson, M.

Johnson and J.S.

Fitzpatrick, T.R. & Tran, T.V. (2002) Bereavement and health among different race and age groups. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Vol. 37(2): 77-92.

Fogelman, E. (1998) Group belonging and mourning as factors in resilience in second generation of Holocaust survivors. *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 85:537-549.

Foote, C.E. & Frank, A.W. (1999) Foucault and therapy: The disciplining of grief. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving & L. Epstein (Ed/s.) *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing, 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. The Harvester Press.

Foucault, M. (2001) *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.

France, A. & Polland, C. (2011) The feds are chasing me...last words of 'gangsta' who was shot by cops. *The Sun*, 9 September. Available at <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3736694/Gunman-killed-in-shootout-with-cops-had-texted-girlfriend-to-say-The-feds-are-following-me.html>. Accessed 30 March 2013.

Francis, V. (1998) *With Hope in their Eyes: The Compelling Stories of the Windrush Generation*. London: Nia.

Frankl, V. (2004) *Man's Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust*. London: Rider.

Freud, S. (1957[1917]) Mourning and melancholia. In J. Strachey (Ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, Vol. 14. London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

Fromm, G.M. (2012) *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations*. London, Karnac Books.

Geertz, C. (1963) The integrative revolution: Primordial sentiments and civil politics in the new states. In C. Geertz (Ed.) *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and African*. London, The Free Press of Glencoe.

Genovese, ED (1972) *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Giddens, A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Theory*. California: University of California Press.

Gillies, J. & Neimeyer, R.A. (2006) Loss, grief, and the search for significance: Toward a model of meaning reconstruction in bereavement. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, Vol. 19(1): 31-65.

- Gilroy, P. (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press.
- Gilroy, P. (2007) *Black Britain: A Photographic History*. Saqi Books.
- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967[1999]) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New Brunswick, Aldine Transaction.
- Goffman, E. (1990) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin.
- Goldsmith, B., Morrison, R.S., Venderwerker, L.C. & Prigerson, H.G. (2008) Elevated rates of prolonged grief disorder in African Americans. *Death Studies*, Vol. 32(4): 352-365.
- Gordon, E.T. (1997) Cultural politics of black masculinity. *Transforming Anthropology*, Vol. 6(1-2): 36-53.
- Gordon, G. (2007) *Towards Bicultural Competence: Beyond Black and White*. London: Trentham Books.
- Grubrich-Simitis, I. (1984) Extreme traumatisations as cumulative trauma. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Vol. 26: 315-350.

Gunaratnam, Y. (1997) Culture is not enough: A critique of multi-culturalism in palliative care. In D. Field, J. Hockey, and N. Small, (Ed/s.) *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge.

Gunaratnam, Y. (2003) *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power*. London: SAGE.

Gunaratnam, Y. (2010) Racialising emotional labour and emotionalising racialised labour: Anger, fear and shame in social welfare. *Journal of Social Work: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community*, Vol. 15(2): 131-148.

Gunaratnam, Y. (2012) Learning to be affected: social suffering and total pain at life's borders. *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 60(1): 108-123.

Habermas, J. (1985) *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston, Beacon Press.

Haddour, A. (2006) *The Fanon Reader*. London: Pluto Press.

Hakim, C. (1987) *Research Design: Strategies and Choices in the Design of Social Research*. Contemporary Social Research Series (13). London, Allen and Unwin.

Hall, S. (1988) Migration from the English speaking Caribbean to the United Kingdom, 1950-1980. In R. Appleyard (Ed.) *International Migration Today. Volume I: Trends and Prospects*. Unesco/University of Western Australia.

- Hall, S. (1990) Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hall, S. (1996) New ethnicities. In D. Morley and K-H. Chen, (Ed/s.) *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Second Edition. London, Routledge.
- Hart, B. (1994) Exile and bereavement. *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, Vol. 8(3): 227-241.
- Hartman, S.V. (2002) The time of slavery. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 101(4): 757-777.
- Henriques, F. (1951) Kinship and death in Jamaica. *Phylon*, Vol. 12(3): 272-278.
- Heuman, G., Walvin, J. (2003) *The Slavery Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Higginson, I.J. & Koffman, J. (2003) Attitudes to timeliness of death and euthanasia among first generation Black Caribbean and White patients and their families living in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Vol. 6(2): 245-249.
- Higman, B.W. (1975) The slave family and household in the British West Indies, 1800-1834. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 6(2): 261-287.

- Hockey, J. (1996) 'The view from the West'. In G. Howarth & P. C. Jupp, (Ed/s.) *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Dying, Death and Disposal*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Hockey, J. (2001) Changing death rituals. In J. Hockey, J. Katz & N. Small (Ed/s.) *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Holland, S.P. (2000) *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*. Duke University Press.
- Holst-Warhaft, G. (2000) *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses*. Harvard, Harvard University Press.
- Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F. (1997) The active interview. In D. Silverman (Ed.) *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London, SAGE Publications.
- Horowitz, M.J., Siegel, B., Holen, A., Bonanno, G.A., Milbrath, C. & Stinson, C.H. (1997) Diagnostic criteria for complicated grief disorder. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 154(7): 904-910.
- Horowitz, S.R. (1997) *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*. New York, State University of New York.
- Howarth, G. (2000) Dismantling the boundaries between life and death. *Mortality*, Vol. 5(2): 127-138.

- Howarth, G. (2007) *Death and Dying: a Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Inikori, J.E., Engerman, S.L., (1992) *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies and Peoples in Africa, the Americas and Europe*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Irish, D.P. (1997) Diversity in universality: Dying, death and grief. In K. Charmaz, G. Howarth and A. Kellehear, (Ed/s.) *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain and the USA*. New York: Macmillan.
- Irish, D.P., Lundquist, K.F. & Nelsen, V.J. (1993) *Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death and Grief: Diversity in Universality*. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- Jackson, M. (1972) The Black experience with death: A brief analysis through Black writings. *OMEGA Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 3(3): 203-209.
- Jasper, L. (2011) Deaths in police custody cut deep in the psyche of black Britons. *The Guardian*, 15 December. Available at [http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/15/deaths-in-custody-black-britons-ipcc\\_](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/15/deaths-in-custody-black-britons-ipcc_) Accessed 30 March 2013.
- Jennings, T. (1990) "US colored women had to go through a plenty": Sexual exploitation of African-American slave women. *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 1(3): 45-74.
- John, G. (2009) *Black and Ethnic Minority Leaders and Managers of Learning Communities*. Available at <http://www.gusjohn.com/2009/01/black-and-ethnic-minority-leaders-and-managers-of-learning-communities/>. Accessed 31 March 2013.



John, G. (2011) *Prof. Gus John's analysis of UK Civil Unrest*. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EienvHmVk5Y>. Accessed 31 March 2013.

Kalra, V.S. & Kapoor, N. (2009) Interrogating segregation, integration and the community cohesion agenda. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 35(9): 1397-1415.

Kalsi, S. (1996) Change and continuity in the funeral rituals of Sikhs in Britain. In G. Howarth and P. Jupp (Ed.) *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Death, Dying and Disposal*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Kaltman, S. & Bonanno, G.A. (2003) Trauma and bereavement: Examining the impact of sudden and violent deaths. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, Vol. 17(2): 131-147.

Karpf, A. (1996) *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*. London: Heinemann.

Katz, J. (2000) Jewish perspectives on death, dying and bereavement. In D. Dickenson, M. Johnson and J.S. Katz, ed. *Death, Dying and Bereavement*. London: SAGE Publications.

Kellehear, A. (1984) Are we a 'death-denying' society? A sociological review. *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 18(9): 713-723.

Kellehear, A. (1989) Ethics and social research. In J. Perry (Ed.) *Doing Fieldwork: Eight Personal Accounts of Social Research*. Sydney, University of New South Wales Press.

Kellehear, A. (1993) *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods*. St. Leonards, Australia, Allen & Unwin.

Kellehear, A. (2002) 'Grief and loss: past, present and future'. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 177: 176.

Kellehear, A. (2005) *Compassionate Cities: Public Health and End-of-Life Care*. New York, Routledge.

Kellehear, A. (2008a) 'Introduction'. In Kubler-Ross, E. (2008) *On Death and Dying: what the dying have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy and their own families*. 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. London: Routledge.

Kellehear, A. (2008b) Dying as a social relationship: A sociological review on debates on the determination of death. *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 66(7): 1533-1544.

Kellehear, A. (2009) On dying and human suffering. *Palliative Medicine*, Vol. 23: 388-397.

Kellehear, A. & Fook, J. (1997) Lassie come home: a study of 'lost pet' notices. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 34(3):191-202.

Kern, A. (1970) The sociology of knowledge in the study of literature. In M.C. Albrecht, J.H. Barrett and M. Griff (Ed/s.) *The Sociology of Art and Literature*. New York, Praeger.

Kincaid, J. (1996) *The Autobiography of My Mother*. New York: Plume.

Kincaid, J. (1998) *My Brother*. London, Vintage.

Kiple, KF & Kiple, VH (1977) Slave child mortality: some nutritional answers to a perennial puzzle. *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 1(4): 419-436.

Kitano, M.K. & Lewis, R.B. (2005) Resilience and coping: implications for gifted children and youth at risk. *Roeper Review*, Vol. 27(4): 200-205.

Klass, D. (1999) Developing a cross-cultural model of grief: the state of the field. *Omega*, Vol. 39 (3): 153-178.

Klass, D. (2001) The inner representations of the dead child in the psychic and social narratives of bereaved parents. In R.A. Neimeyer (Ed.) *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*. Washington, American Psychological Association.

Klass, D. (2006) Continuing conversations about continuing bonds. *Death Studies*, Vol. 30(9): 843-858.

Klass, D. (2013) Sorrow and solace: Neglected areas in bereavement research. *Death Studies*, Vol. 37(7): 597-616.

Klass, D. & Goss, R. (2003) The politics of grief and continuing bonds with the dead: The cases of Maoist China and Wahhabi Islam. *Death Studies*, Vol. 27(9): 787-811.

Klass, D., Silverman, P.R. & Nickman, S.I. (1996) *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.

Klein, H.S. (2010) *The Atlantic Slave Trade: New Approaches to the Americas*. New Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Klein, H.S. & Engerman, S.L. (1997) Long-term trends in African mortality in the transatlantic slave trade. *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 18(1): 36-48.

Klein, H.S., Engerman, S.L., Haines, R. & Shlomowitz, R. (2001) Transoceanic mortality: The slave trade in comparative perspective. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 58(1): 93-118.

Koffman, J. & Higginson, I.J. (2004) Dying to be home? Preferred location of death of first-generation Black Caribbean and native-born white patients in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Vol. 7(5): 628-636.

Koffman, J., Morgan, M., Edmonds, P., Speck, P. & Higginson, I.J. (2008) "I know he controls cancer": The meanings of religion among Black Caribbean and White British patients with advanced cancer. *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 67: 780-789.

Kofman, S. (1998) *Smothered Words*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Kotkin, J. (1992) *Tribes: how race, religion and identity determine success in the new global economy*. New York: Random House.

Krystal, H. (1988) *Integration and Self-Healing*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969) *On Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan.

Kubler-Ross, E & Kessler, D. (2005) *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*. London: Simon & Schuster.

Larson, P.M. (1999) Reconsidering trauma, identity, and the African diaspora: Enslavement and historical memory in nineteenth-century Highland Madagascar. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 56(2): 335-362.

Laurie, A. & Neimeyer, R.A. (2008) African Americans in bereavement: Grief as a function of ethnicity. *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 57(2): 173-193.

Lawrence, D. (2012) Stephen Lawrence: Time for Justice , *BBC ONE Panorama*, Tuesday 3 January 2012.

Lawrence, D. (2012) 'Stephen Lawrence's mother visits his grave in Jamaica', *BBC News*, 3 January 2012. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16363857>. Accessed 21 July 2012.

Leat, D. (1972) Misunderstanding *Verstehen*. *Sociological Review*, Vol. 20: 29-38.

LeCompte, M.D. & Schensul, J.J. (1999) *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*. AltaMira Press.

Leonard, E.M., Miles, L.E. & Van der Kar, C. S. (1944) *The Child: At Home and School*. American Book Co.

Levy, A. (1995) *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. London, Headline Review.

Levy, A. (2004) *Small Island*. London: Headline Publishing.

Levy, A. (2010a) *The Long Song*. London: Headline Publishing.

Levy, A. (2010b) I started to realise what fiction could be. And I thought, wow! You can take on the world: Andrea Levy interviewed by Gary Young. *The Guardian*, 30 January 2010. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jan/30/andrea-levy-long-song-interview>. Accessed 9 August 2010.

Levy, A. & Morrison, B. (2009) Andrea Levy interviewed by Blake Morrison. *Women: A Cultural Review*. Vol. 20(3): 325-338.

Lewis, D. (1992) Myths of motherhood and power: The construction of the black woman in literature. *English in Africa*. Vol. 19(1): 35-51.

Lifton, R.J. (1979) *The Broken Connection*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Lindemann, E. (1944) The symptomatology and management of acute grief. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 6: 141-148.

Locke, A. L. (1992) *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations*. Jeffrey C. Stewart (ed.), Washington DC: Howard University Press.

Loomba, A. (1998) *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.

Lovejoy, P.E. (1982) The volume of the Atlantic slave trade: A synthesis. *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 23(4): 473-501.

Luciano, D. (2003) 'Passing shadows: melancholic nationality and black critical publicity in Pauline E. Hopkins's *Of One Blood*'. In D.L. Eng & D. Kazanjian (Ed/s.) *Loss*. California: University of California Press.

MacDonald, J. (2001) *Portrait of Black Achievement: Composing Successful Careers*. Wiltshire, Lifetime Careers Publishing.

Maciejewski, P.K., Zhang, B., Block, S.D. & Prigerson, H.G. (2007) An empirical examination of the stage theory of grief. *Journal of American Medical Association*, Vol. 297(7): 716-723.

Macpherson, W. (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence inquiry. Report of an inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny*. London: Stationery Office.

Manning, P. (1990) The slave trade: the global demography of a global system. *Social Science History*, Vol. 14(2): 255-279.

Manstead, A. S. R. & Semin, G. R. (1988) Methodology in Social Psychology: Turning Ideas into Actions. In M. Hewstone, Stroebe, W., Stephenson, G. & Codol, J-P. (Ed/s.) *Introduction to Social Psychology: A European Textbook*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Marris, P. (1974) *Loss and Change*. London, Routledge.

Martin, A. & Greenwood, C. (2013) Posing with a killer and a gangster, 'family man' Mark Duggan whose death led to 2011 summer riots. *Daily Mail*, 31 January. Available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2271564/Mark-Duggan-Posing-killer-gangster-family-man-death-led-riots.html>. Accessed 3 March 2013.

Marwaha, S. & Livingston, G. (2002) Stigma, racism or choice. Why do depressed ethnic elders avoid psychiatrists? *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Vol. 72: 257-265.

Marwit, S.J. & Klass, D. (1994-1995) Grief and the role of the inner representation of the deceased. *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 30(4): 283-289.

Mason, K. (1986) Review: Demography, disease and medical care in Caribbean slave societies. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 5(1): 109-119.

Masten, A.S., Best, K.M. & Garmezy, N. (1990) Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome anxiety. *Development and Psychopathology*, Vol. 2(4): 425-444.

Mazor, A. & Mendelsohn, Y. (1998) 'Spouse bereavement processes of Holocaust child survivors: can one differentiate a black frame from a black background?' *Contemporary Family Therapy*, Vol. 20(1): 79-91.

McManners, J. (1985) *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death in Eighteenth Century France*. Oxford, Oxford Paperbacks.



McClean, C., Campbell, C. & Cornish, F. (2003) African-Caribbean interactions with mental health services in the UK: experiences and expectations of exclusion as (re)productive of health inequalities. *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 56: 657-669.

Meggison, L.C. (1964) Key to competition is management. *Petroleum management*, Vol 36(1): 91-95.

Miller, JC (1981) Mortality in the Atlantic slave trade: statistical evidence on causality. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 11(3): 385-423.

Mills, C.W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Modood, T. (1993) The number of ethnic minority student in British higher education: Some grounds for optimism. *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 19(2): 167-182.

Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J., Smith, P., Virdee, S. & Beishon, S. (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage. The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (PSI Report)*. London, Policy Studies Institute.

Morrison, T. (1987[2005]) *Beloved*. London: Vintage.

Morgan, P.D. (1997) The cultural implications of the Atlantic slave trade: African regional origins, American destinations and new world developments. *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 18(1): 122-145.

Moynagh, M. (2008) 'The melancholic structure of memory in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*'. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43: 57-75.

National Archives (2003) *Black Presence: The Triangular Trade*. Available at [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/africa\\_caribbean/docs/trade\\_routes.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/africa_caribbean/docs/trade_routes.htm). Accessed 3 November 2001.

Neimeyer, R.A. & Levitt, H.M. (2000) What's narrative got to do with it? Construction and coherence in accounts of loss. In J.H. Harvey and E.D. Miller (Ed/s.) *Loss and Trauma: General and Close Relationship Perspectives*. New York, Routledge.

Neria, Y. & Litz, B.T. (2004) Bereavement by traumatic means: The complex synergy of trauma and grief. *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress and Coping*. Vol. 9(1): 73-87.

Neto, A. (1998) Farewell at the moment of parting. In U. Beier & G. Moore (Ed/s.) *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*. London, Penguin Books.

Nichanian, M. (2003) Catastrophic mourning. In D.L. Eng, D.L. & D. Kazanjian (Ed.) *Loss*, California: University of California Press.

Noys, B. (2005) *The Culture of Death*. Oxford, Berg Publishers.

Nurse, K. (2004) Masculinities in transition: Gender and the global problematique. In Reddock, R. (Ed.) *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. Jamaica, The University of the West Indies.

Olwig, K.F. (2009) A proper funeral: Contextualizing community among Caribbean migrants. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 15: 520-537.

Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1994) *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the Present*. New York: Routledge.

Osterweis, M, Solomon, F. & Green, M. (1984) *Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences and Care*. Washington: National Academy Press.

Palmie, S. (1996a) *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*. University of Tennessee Press.

Palmie, S. (1996b) A taste for human commodities. In S. Palmie, ed. *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*. University of Tennessee Press.

Panorama (2012) Stephen Lawrence: Time for Justice. *BBC ONE*, 3 January 2012. Available at <http://vimeo.com/49318857>. Accessed 31 March 2013.

Parkes, C.M. (1965a) Bereavement and mental illness. Part I. A clinical study of the grief of bereaved psychiatric patients. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, Vol. 38: 1-26.

Parkes, C.M. (1965b) Bereavement and mental illness. Part II. A classification of bereavement reactions. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, Vol. 38: 1-26.

Parkes, C.M. (1971) Psycho-social transitions: a field for study. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 5: 101-115.

Parkes, C.M. (1972) *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Later Life*. London: Tavistock.

Parkes, C.M (1975) Psycho-social transitions: comparison between reactions to loss of a limb and loss of a spouse. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 127:204-210.

Parkes, C.M. (1988) Bereavement as a psychosocial transition: processes of adaptation to change. In D. Dickenson and M. Johnson (Ed/s.) *Death, Dying and Bereavement*. London: Sage.

Parkes, C.M. (1993) Bereavement as a psycho-social transition. In M.S. Stroebe & R.O. Stroebe (Ed/s.) *Handbook of Bereavement*. New York: Hansson.

Parkes, C.M., Laungani, P. & Young, B. (1997) *Death and Bereavement across Cultures*. New York: Routledge.

Parkes, C.M. & Weiss, R. (1983) *Recovery from Bereavement*. New York: Basic Books.

Parry, O. (2004) Masculinities, myths and educational underachievement: Jamaica, Barbados, St Vincent and the Grenadines. In R. Reddock (Ed.) *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. Jamaica, The University of the West Indies.

Paton, D. (2001) Punishment, crime, and the bodies of slaves in eighteenth-century Jamaica. *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 34(4): 923-954.

Patterson, O. (1982) *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Paul, A. (2007) "No grave cannot hold my body down": Rituals of death and burial in postcolonial Jamaica. *Small Axe*, Vol. 11(2): 142-162.

Pazicky, D.L. (1998) *Cultural Orphans in America*. Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi.

Perry, H.L. (1993) Mourning and funeral customs of African Americans. In Irish, D.P., Lundquist, K.F. & Nelsen, V.J. (Ed/s.) *Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death and Grief: Diversity in Universality*. Washington: Taylor & Francis.

Phillips, D. (2009) Minority ethnic segregation, integration and citizenship: A European perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 36(2): 209-225.

Phillips, M. & Phillips, T. (1998) *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Pines, D. (1986) Working with women survivors of the Holocaust: affective experiences in transference and countertransference. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 67: 295-307.

Prigerson, H.G., Maciejewski, P.K., Reynolds, C.F. III., Bierhals, A.J., Newsom, J.T., Fasiczka, A., Frank, E., Doman, J. & Miller, M. (1995) Inventory of Complicated Grief: A scale to measure maladaptive symptoms of loss. *Psychiatry Research*, Vol. 59: 65-79.

- Pryce, K. (1986) *Endless Pressure: Study of West Indian Lifestyles in Bristol*. Bristol, Bristol Classical Press.
- Punch, M. (1986) *The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork*. Beverly Hills, CA, Sage.
- Rando, T.A. (1993) *Treatment of Complicated Mourning*. Champaign: Research Press.
- Raphael, B. (1984) *The Anatomy of Bereavement: a handbook for the caring professions*. London: Hutchinson.
- Reddock, R.E. (1985) Women and slavery in the Caribbean: A feminist perspective. *Latin American Perspective*, Vol. 12(1): 63-80.
- Rex, J. (1973) *Race, Colonialism and the City*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rex, J. (1979) Black militancy and class conflict. In R. Miles and A. Phizacklea (Eds.) *Racism and Political Action in Britain*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rex, J. (1983) *Race Relations in Sociological Theory*. Second Edition. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Reynolds, N.Z. (2001) *When I came to England*. London: Black Stock.
- Robinson, C. (1983) *Black Marxism: The Making of the Radical Black Tradition*. London: Zed.

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. Second Edition. Oxford, Blackwell.

Rogers, L.S. (2004) Meaning of bereavement among older African American widows. *Geriatric Nursing*, Vol. 25(1): 10-16.

Rollock, N., Vincent, C., Gillborn, D., Ball, S. (2012) 'Middle class by profession': Class status and identification amongst Black middle classes. *Ethnicities*, Vol. 13(3): 253-275.

Rosenblatt, P. (2007) Recovery following bereavement: Metaphor, phenomenology and culture. *Death Studies*, Vol. 32(1): 6-16.

Rosenblatt, P.C. & Wallace, B.R. (2005a) *African American Grief*. New York: Routledge.

Rosenblatt, P.C. & Wallace, B.R. (2005b) Narratives of grieving African-Americans about racism in the lives of deceased family members. *Death Studies*, Vol. 29(3): 217-235.

Rosenblatt, P., Walsh, R. & Jackson, D. (1976) *Grief and Mourning in Cross-cultural Perspective*. Washington. DC: HRAP Press.

Rubin, S.S., Malkinson, R. & Witztum, E. (2003) Trauma and bereavement: Conceptual and clinical issues revolving around relationships. *Death Studies*, Vol. 27(8): 667-690.

Safford, F. (1995) Aging stressors for Holocaust survivors and their families. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Vol. 24(1-2): 131-153.

Said, E.W. (1979[2003]) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.

Salahu-Din, S. (1996) A comparison of coping strategies of African American and Caucasian widows. *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 33(2): 103-120.

Saldanha, A. (2006) Reontologising race: the machinic geography of phenotype. *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space*, Vol. 24: 9-24.

Samarel, N. (1995) The dying process. In H. Wass & R.A. Neimeyer (Ed/s.) *Dying: Facing the Facts*. Third Edition. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.

Sarantakos, S. (2005) *Social Research*. Third Edition. Palgrave Macmillan.

Schaverien, J. (1998) Inheritance: Jewish identity and the legacy of the Holocaust mediated through art psychotherapy groups. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. 15(1): 65-79.

Scheper-Hughes, N. (1993) *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. California, University of California Press.

Schiller, G, Basch, N.L. & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992) *Toward a Transnational Perspective on Migration*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.

Schut, H. A. W., Stroebe, M. S., Boelen, P. A., & Zijerveld, A. M. (2006). Continuing relationships with the deceased: Disentangling bonds and grief. *Death Studies*, 30, 757–766.



- Schutz, A. (1972) *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. London, Heinemann.
- Scott, K. (1999) *Benang: from the heart*. Perth: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.
- Seale, C. (1998) *Constructing Death. The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Secomb, L. (2002) Autothanatography. *Mortality*, Vol. 7(1): 33-46.
- Selvon, S. (2006) *The Lonely Londoners*. London, Penguin Classics.
- Selvon, S. (2008) *Moses Ascending*. London, Penguin Classics.
- Sewell, WH. Jr (1992) A theory of structure: duality, agency and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 98(1): 1-29.
- Sheridan, RB (1985) *Doctors and Slaves: A medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the British West Indies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shernoff, M. (1998) Gay widowers: grieving in relation to trauma and social supports. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, Vol. 2: 1.
- Silver, R.C. & Wortman, C.B. (2007) The stage theory of grief: letter to the editor. *Journal of American Medical Association*, Vol. 297(24): 2692.

Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London, SAGE Publications.

Simmel, G. (1950) The Stranger. In K. Wolff (Ed.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 402-408. New York, Free Press.

Simpson, G.E. (1957) The nine night ceremony in Jamaica. *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 70(278): 329-335.

Smaje, C. & Field, D. (1997) Absent minorities? Ethnicity and the use of palliative care services. In D. Field, J. Hockey, and N. Small, (Ed/s.) *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge.

Small, N. (2001) Theories of grief: a critical review. In J. Hockey, J. Katz & N. Small (Eds.) *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Smith, S.H. (2002) "Fret no more my child...for I'm all over heaven all day": Religious beliefs in the bereavement of African American, middle-aged daughters coping with the death of an elderly mother. *Death Studies*, Vol. 26: 309-323.

Solomos, J., Back, L. (1994) Conceptualising racisms: Social theory, politics and research. *Sociology*, Vol. 28(1): 143-161.

Soto-Crespo, R. E. & Kincaid, J. (2002) 'Death and the diaspora writer: hybridity and mourning in the work of Jamaica Kincaid'. *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 43(2): 342-376.

Stamp, KM (1971) Rebels and Sambos: The search for the negro's personality in slavery.

*The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 37(3): 367-392.

Steckel, RH (1979) Slave mortality: analysis of evidence from plantation records. *Social*

*Science History*, Vol. 3(3/4): 86-114.

St Louis., B. (2010) Post-race/post-politics? Activist-intellectualism and the reification of

race. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25(4): 652-675.

Strange, J-M. (2005) *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*. Cambridge,

Cambridge University Press.

Straube, S.H. (2004) *Pet Death*. New York, Baywood Publishing.

Stroebe, M. (1993) 'Coping with bereavement: review of the grief work hypothesis'.

*OMEGA*, 26(1): 19-42.

Stroebe, M. (2001) Gender differences in adjustment to bereavement: An empirical and

theoretical review. *Review of General Psychology*, Vol. 5(1): 62-83.

Stroebe, M., Gergen, M.M., Gergen, K.J. & Stroebe, W. (1992) Broken hearts or broken

bonds: Love and death in historical perspective. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 47(10): 1205-

1212.

Stroebe, M. & Schut, H. (1999) The dual process model of coping with bereavement:

Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, Vol. 23(3): 197-224.

Stroebe, M. Schut, H. & Stroebe, W. (2007) Health outcomes of bereavement. *The Lancet*, Vol. 370(9603): 1960-1973.

Sullivan, M.A. (1995) May the circle be unbroken: The African-American experience of death, dying, and spirituality. In J.K Parry & A.S. Ryan (Ed/s.) *A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying, and Religion*. USA: Wadsworth Publications.

Tedeschi, R.G. & Calhoun, L.G. (2004) Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 15(1): 1-18.

Tettenborn, E. (2006) Melancholia as resistance in contemporary African American literature. *MELUS*, Vol. 31(3): 101-121.

The Black Cultural Archives and Lambeth (1998) *The Windrush Legacy: Memories of Britain's post-war Caribbean Immigrants*. London: The Black Cultural Archives.

The Telegraph (2011) UK riots: Mark Duggan was nephew of Manchester gangster Desmond Noonan. *The Telegraph*, 12 August. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8697208/UK-riots-Mark-Duggan-was-nephew-of-Manchester-gangster-Desmond-Noonan.html>. Accessed 30 March 2013.

Thornton Dill, B. (1986) Our mother's grief: Racial ethnic women and the maintenance of families. *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 13(4): 415-431.

Tololyan, K. (2007) The contemporary discourse of diaspora studies. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 27(3): 647-655.

Trouillot, M-R. (1992) The vulgarity of power. *Public Culture*, Vol. 5(1): 75-81.

Valentine, C. (2006) Academic constructions of bereavement. *Mortality*, Vol. 11(1): 57-78.

Valentine, C. (2007a) Methodological reflections attending and tending to the role of the researcher in the construction of bereavement narratives. *Qualitative Social Work*, Vol. 6(2): 159-176.

Valentine, C. (2007b) *Bereavement and Identity: Making Sense of Bereavement in Contemporary British Society*. Ph.D. thesis, Bath University.

Valentine, C. (2008) *Bereavement Narratives: Continuing Bonds in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Routledge.

Valentine, C. (2009) Continuing bonds after bereavement: A cross-cultural perspective. *Bereavement Care*, Vol. 28(2): 6-11.

Van der Houwen, K., Stroebe, M., Stroebe, W., Schut, H., Van den Bout, J., & Wijngaards-de Meij, L. (2010). Risk factors for bereavement outcome: A multivariate approach. *Death Studies*, Vol. 34, 195–220.

Van Gennep, A. (2004) *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge.

- Versalle, A. & McDowel, E.E. (2004-2005) The attitudes of men and women concerning gender attitudes in grief, *OMEGA – The Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 50(1): 53-67.
- Vertovec, S. (1997) Three meanings of ‘diaspora’, exemplified among South Asian religions. *Diaspora*, Vol. 6(3): 277-299.
- Vertovec, S. (2002) Transnational networks and skilled labour migration. Paper presented at *Ladenburger Diskurs “Migration” Gottlieb Daimler- und Karl Benz-Stiftung* conference, Ladenburg, 14-15 February 2002. Available at <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/WPTC-02-02%20Vertovec.pdf>. Accessed 27 May 2013.
- Walter, T. (1996) ‘A new model of grief: bereavement and biography’. *Mortality*, 1: 7-25.
- Walter, T. (1999) *On Bereavement: The Culture of Grief*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Walter, T. (2005-2006) What is complicated grief? A social constructionist perspective. *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 52(1): 71-79.
- Walvin, J. (2001) *Black Ivory: Slavery in the British Empire*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wardi, D. (1992) *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust*. London: Routledge.

Webb, E., Campbell, D., Schwartz, R. and Sechrest, L. (1966) *Unobtrusive Measures: Non-Reactive Research in the Social Sciences*. Chicago, Rand McNally & Co.

Weber, M. (2011) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition*. Translated and introduced by Stephen Kalberg. New York, Boston University Press.

Weiner, J.S. (2007) The stage theory of grief: letter to the editor'. *Journal of American Medical Association*, Vol. 297(24): 2692-2693.

Werbner, P. (1997) Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity. In P. Werbner & T. Modood (Ed/s.) *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London: Zen Books.

Werbner, P. & Modood, T. (1997) *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London: Zed Books.

Whitehead, T.L. (1978) Residence, kinship and mating as survival strategies: A West Indian example. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 40(4): 817-828.

Wilkinson, R. & Pickett, K. (2010) *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. London, Penguin.

Williams, E.E. (1944) *Capitalism and Slavery*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Winnik, H.Z. (1968) Contribution to a symposium on psychic traumatization through social catastrophe. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 49: 298-301.

Worden, J. W. (1991[1982]) *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: Routledge.

Wortman, C.B. & Silver, R.C. (1989) The myths of coping with loss. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 57(3): 349-357.

Yin, R.K. (2009) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. California: Sage.

Young, R.J.C. (2003) *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zeleza, P.T. (2005) Rewriting the African diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic. *African Affairs*, Vol. 104(414): 35-68.



## Appendix

### Terms and Concepts

**African-Caribbean:** In the post-colonial Caribbean islands African-Caribbean people form the majority population. They are the descendants of slaves although the link has been severed by colonial identifications and social stereotypes. In Britain African-Caribbean people are those who migrated from the Caribbean mainly in the 1950s with the intention to work in the colonial Motherland. They identify with a British African-Caribbean identity.

**West Indian:** West Indian is another term used by senior African-Caribbean people in Britain to describe themselves and their geographical origins. The British West Indies include the islands bordering the Caribbean Sea, plus the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands, which are surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean.

**Windrush:** MV Empire Windrush was the name of the ship that arrived at Tilbury on 22 June 1948 carrying 493 passengers from Jamaica. The passengers were the first large group of West Indian immigrants to arrive in the United Kingdom after the Second World War. The ship, its imagery and name represent the experiences of African-Caribbean migrants who were willing to offer their labour and find a new life in the United Kingdom. Their rejection and social exclusion was experienced as loss because they had invested in the colonial relationship with metropolitan Britain. The Windrush narrative does not represent the totality of African-Caribbean experiences in Britain but a large section of the community identify with it because it speaks about their social problems and the experiences of their forebears. In this thesis participants were familiar with the Windrush history and highlighted it as a landmark starting point of their history in Britain.

**Diaspora:** Diaspora is an ethnic community that has been dispersed in multiple locations around the world. Cohen (1997) has identified different types of diasporas including trauma/victim, labour, trade and cultural. African-Caribbean people are of the trauma/victim and cultural type diaspora. Diasporas may have experienced movements multiple times throughout history, or they may lead transnational lives.

**Hybridity:** Hybridity represents an identification mode common in diasporic communities. It involves the creative combination of diverse and often incompatible references into an identity that challenges social stereotypes, inequalities and claims to essential origins. Hybrid identities are new reflexive ethnicities. In this thesis, I argued that grief and loss are intrinsically related to hybrid identifications. In processes of bereavement African-Caribbean participants of this research complicated their identities as they reflected upon loss and grief and the impact that these had upon their lives. Social hybridity is resilient, flexible and empowering in contexts of postmodern multiplicity. In experiences of bereavement hybridity is conducive to social change.

**Race:** Race in this thesis is a central analytical category. This is because racialised experiences, including structural inequalities and social stereotypes caused loss and grief and complicated processes of bereavement adaptation. This thesis takes a social constructionist approach to race aiming to depict how definitions evolve in the process of negotiations of loss. The descriptions provided do not intend to reify the concept, but to demonstrate the implications of its use with reference to experiences of bereavement. When loss is the topic under consideration, the past and historical relationships are crucial in negotiations of the present and future directions. Although modernist definitions of race are described, this

thesis proposes a more open, compassionate and reflexive approach to social relationships that includes loss and overcomes the divisive influences of race.

**Ethnicity & Nationality:** Ethnicity and nationality were not central analytical categories in this thesis. African-Caribbean people in Britain are British. Their historical experience has been defined by colonial relationships and identifications. They aspire social inclusion and acceptance of difference. They are only concerned with ethnicity because they have interests in maintaining diverse cultural traditions; and with nationality because race hinders full representation in society and citizenship rights.

**Gender:** Gender is an important analytical category the intersections of which were studied alongside race. The approach served to problematize identities and reveal social complexity. Gender served to theorise unique bereavement processes within racialised relationships. Although gender does not serve to fully deconstruct social categories, it represents a form of difference and diversity within unequal social contexts. Gender identities are crucial in African-Caribbean participants' efforts to overcome loss.

**Culture:** In contemporary societies we refer to cultures when we talk about attitudes, organised within sets of meanings and understandings. In this thesis, I explore African-Caribbean attitudes towards death, dying and bereavement. Due to the historical legacy of slavery and racialised oppression and inequalities in the Western world, attitudes towards loss organised into systems to serve the purpose of dealing more effectively with the experience. This is what I call African-Caribbean 'cultures of grief'. Cultures are not definitive and in postmodern societies they are multiple and reflexive. Hybridity is a cultural identity that reflects postmodern characteristics. I argue that social relationships need to transform in order to serve cultural diversity, and propose that acceptance and

communication of experiences of loss can serve this purpose because they promote reconciliation, recognition and representation, all of which are conducive to social compassion, empathy and consolation.