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## Abstracts

Arts and Human Research Council (AHRC) on African Caribbean Women's Mobility and Self-fashioning in Post  
Disapora Contexts Seminar

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### **Diaspora, Transnationality and the Affective Trajectories of Black British Identity**

Questions of transnational Caribbean and Black diasporic cultural identities are central to my work on British Caribbean women's everyday practices and conceptions of freedom. A key aspect of this work involves analysing how and why Caribbean and Black identities and identifications are reproduced, re-configured and sustained in the present and what this may tell us about the changing cultural politics of postcoloniality.

This research cluster offers me the opportunity to both engage with how other Caribbean scholars are responding to the concept of post-diaspora and to evaluate its usefulness and limitations in relation to my own work. I intend to use this forum to focus on two key questions. First, what forms of emancipatory subjectivity are imagined and enabled in the processes of journeying between multiple registers of 'home', and 'foreign', especially where these produce discrepant affective registers of 'grounding', familiarity, identification, and orientation, but also, potential unsettlement, foreignness, disidentification and disorientation. Second, how can the concept of post-diaspora contribute to an analysis of these processes and help to explain the cultural politics of postcolonial identities?

In this first paper, I present some of the findings and analysis from my book, *Decolonizing and Feminizing Freedom a Caribbean Genealogy* (2017), which will form the springboard for answering these questions. Draws on research with Caribbean women in Britain, this paper presents the multidimensional practices of diasporic and transnational identifications and self-orientations through which they narrated specifically Caribbean and gendered expressions of Black womanhood and Black Britishness.

**Denise Noble, Birmingham City University.**

### **Mapping a Post-Diaspora Poetics of Black Women's Writing in Canada**

In this particular reading of blackness in Canada, I offer three exploratory tropes of black possibilities as a way of accounting for my own displaced black Jamaican body in Canada and the multiple intersections that connect my memories and desires of a more hopeful future to the circulating stories of African peoples similarly dispersed across the world. These three tropes—horizon, sea, and sound—frame my understanding of myself in and out of place, not as an anchored being, but as a body slippery, amorphous, expansive and transformative. These tropes are layered one upon the other and are in many ways interdependent. I use them specifically to read the works of Caribbean and African women writers in Canada. In so doing, I foreground a critique of settler colonial nations like Canada and make black peoples and peoples of colour and immigrant women accountable to the nation; that is, accountable to making the nation more critically aware of itself and the inequalities it perpetuates.

**Andrea Davis, York University, Canada**

## **‘Globalisation Struggle and Survival of Jamaican Women Migrants’**

The UN Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), the UN Sustainable Development Goals and CEDAW, the Women’s Rights Convention, provide a framework to reflect on ways in which African Caribbean women have used migration for agency, equality, economic empowerment and self-identity in the rapidly changing context of globalisation.

**Purpose:** The paper examines the scope, characteristics and consequences of Jamaican women’s migration to Britain, North America and Canada in recent decades and policy responses.

**Methodology:** Caribbean gender and development theories guide this case study on the situation of Jamaican women migrants in the Post Diaspora context of Britain, Canada and North America. It uses research on migration related to human trafficking, decent work and domestic workers, as well as temporary migrant workers (teachers, nurses and hospitality workers). A content analysis of Jamaica’s International Migration Policy also assesses coherence in government policy responses to international migration trends and the National Policy for Gender Equality (2011).

**Results:** Despite many achievements, the rapid pace of globalisation presents many areas for research to protect the rights of Jamaican women migrants, promote agency and economic empowerment and enhance policy coherence.

**Key words:** Jamaican-women-migrants; human trafficking, gender equality, policy coherence

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## **Gender, Generation and Diaspora in 21st century modes of Caribbean engagement and governance**

Feminist scholars have long argued the existence of gender hegemonies in diasporic formations, and the tendency for the contributions of women to social transformation to be relegated as secondary to the ‘important business’ of economic growth and political freedom. Linked to nationalist constructions of belonging, authenticity and citizenship nationalist approaches to diaspora rarely paid attention to existing gender, class, and racializing asymmetries that differentially positioned diaspora members within nationalist narratives. In this paper I argue that the recent emergence of diaspora strategies as a cornerstone of state governance threatens to reproduce the gender hegemonies of the past by focusing almost exclusively on the contributions of entrepreneurial émigré’s, particularly those of high net worth. I also argue that contemporary state diaspora strategies potentially miss opportunities for progressive social transformation by devaluing the potential contributions of second and third generation diaspora members. Bringing cultural approaches, that view diaspora as a site of heterogeneity, contestation, creativity and innovation, into conversation with state-driven instrumental ones, this paper explores the ways that more mobile and enabling articulations of diasporic identity, particularly among second and third generation women could enhance the transformative potential of diaspora/state encounters in the multiple spaces that constitute the Caribbean diaspora.

**Beverley Mullings, Queens University, Canada**

## **Caribbean in/securities, gender and post-diaspora**

This paper comes out a parallel network: an interdisciplinary international Leverhulme-funded network entitled ‘Caribbean in/securities and creativity’ see <https://cariscc.wordpress.com/> The network seeks to re-theorise insecurity in the region, beyond criminality and violence, towards consideration of a range of different precarious and insecure situations (e.g. environmental and livelihood insecurities) which are negotiated through everyday life, and, crucially, through creative practice.

I will outline the network's theoretical and conceptual approaches, looking at how they might intersect with those of the post-diaspora network, and relate this to the work of the Jamaican novelist Erna Brodber, whose creative research and writing offers a gender-based approach both to in/security and to post-diaspora.

**Pat Noxolo, Birmingham University**

### **Diasporic Promiscuities: Research Reflections**

Diaspora, diasporic, diasporize. Whether as noun, adjective, or even verb, the term seems to have taken on a life of its own, from academics to World Bank officials, from state managers to communities. In worlds where diaspora proliferates, how might we specify more precisely without either limiting or drawing new boundaries around extra-territorial movement?

Drawing on scholarship on transnational gendered itineraries and recent events in the region, this contribution reflects on the emancipatory possibilities that emerge when we turn our attention to women's connective and cross-border practices, where diasporic reproduction takes place, beyond gendered and sexual respectability, in unanticipated and transgressive ways.

**Alissa Trotz**

### **Africa-Caribbean Women and London-based Universities in the 1920s and 1930s.**

The aim for my research within the Network is to investigate concepts of diaspora and post-diaspora in relation to 1920s and 1930s multi-ethnic London, seeking to document as far as possible the migratory routes, settlement and housing experiences, studying experiences, friendships, networks, and developments of diasporic and post-diasporic identities of women of African-Caribbean heritage who were studying in the imperial metropole. This research is inspired by the work I carried out in collaboration with Dr. Caroline Bressey, Director of the UCL Equiano Centre, where we explored and mapped the historical geographies of the interwar Black community in relation to the London art world.

In this initial exploratory talk, I will focus on some of the histories, experiences and concepts I hope to investigate within the project. I intend my research to focus on the Network themes of the 'concept of return' and the 'gender dimensions of post-diaspora for African-Caribbean women, with its emphasis on multi-directional mobility and instability' by mapping routes of travel, migration and re-migration; mobility, settlement and instability in housing due to the intersections of race and gender; and the diasporic, post-diasporic, multi-ethnic gendered experiences of living and studying in 1920s and 1930s London.

I will focus on exploring archival sources to reconstruct aspects of these histories, investigating documents such as passenger returns, census material, and electoral registers, student registration documents, library reader registrations, and archives of student societies and organisations. For example, through shipping passenger returns I will seek to map the routes of migration and re-migration of African-Caribbean women studying in 1920s and 1930s Britain, specifically London.

I aim to explore within the project the experiences of African-Caribbean women students in finding housing and the role of geography and settlement in shaping individuals' experiences and identities, including diasporic and post-diasporic identities. I will explore the racial and gendered dimensions of the experiences of finding accommodation in interwar London, focusing on racism in accommodation and the experiences of Black women in finding accommodation in hostels and hotels. I will seek to explore the type of accommodation African-Caribbean women resided in – who else lived there and why - and seek to investigate how, because of these lived experiences, new diasporic and gendered identities might have been formed and forged.

**Gemma Romain**

## **African-Caribbean Women's Health in the Atlantic Diaspora.**

The aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which the mobility has affected African-Caribbean Women's health in the Atlantic diaspora. By the Atlantic diaspora, I mean North America, Britain and the Caribbean. Inequalities in health in African-Caribbean women are enduring. African-Caribbean women experience a higher incidence of diabetes, hypertension and stroke (Lane et al, 2005; Collins and Johnson, 2008). In addition, Black Caribbean women with breast cancer have a significantly worse survival rate (Bowen, 2008; Jack et al, 2009). In relation to mental health, the research emphasis has been on Black Caribbean men with high rates of serious mental illness, while Black women have been seemingly ignored (Edge, 2013). The reproductive and sexual health of Black Caribbean women is also of concern.

In the UK, policy and health service developments focusing on the health of Black and Minority ethnic health issues have failed to account for the specificity of Black Caribbean women's health and wellbeing. The inequalities African-Caribbean women face in education, employment, health and social care because of their racialised, gendered and classed experience are detrimental to their health and have a major impact on their life chances over the life course (Douglas and Watson, 2013).

Despite the geographical differences between African-Caribbean women in the UK and African- American women in the USA, research on inequalities in health highlights the relatively poor health of both groups and the similarities in demographic, social, health and economic profiles (Nazroo et al. 2007). Moreover, these two groups are not completely distinct as in addition to their histories emerging from transatlantic slavery, there has been continuous migration from the Caribbean to the USA and from the Caribbean to the UK as well as migration of African-Caribbeans from the UK to the USA, thus creating transnational Caribbean diasporic communities.

This paper will examine the impact of migration and mobility on the health of African-Caribbean women in the UK, North America and the Caribbean.

**Jenny Douglas**

## **Remembering "political blackness" as a space for agency, transformation and the emergence of post-diaspora identities.**

I've been working on archival material that uses the life-writing method to compile oral histories of black women's 'belonging' and activism in twenty-first century Britain. Today I'm focusing on the life-writing narratives of Black women involved in Black women's groups and the Black women's movement during the 1970s and '80s: I'm examining the reconfiguration of 'Black' in these life writing testimonies, as a connecting, oppositional identity. I interrogate both the movement's memorialisation in the context of British 'heritage' and its use, in academic contexts, to critique the perceived failures of political Blackness as a means defining feminist activism. Despite this critique, I propose that the Black women's movement's emphasis on an anti-imperialist context for identity formation, its focus on the practice of transculturality and its commitment to political social and cultural transformation as a mark of black feminist activism, provides a framework within to better understand emerging cultural production defined as 'Black British' in contemporary post-diaspora contexts.

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## **African Caribbean Women, Diaspora and Educational Agency**

There is a long held perception of the connection between parental disposition and educational attainment and research regarding parental involvement would appear to support this. The popular belief is, given that African Caribbean children are one of the lower achieving groups academically as well as being over represented in exclusions from school statistics, the parents, mainly mothers, are less interested or engaged with their children's education and schooling. The simplicity of this argument espousing parental culpability finds favour within wider political, sociological and journalistic discourses where theories of cultural, material

and cognitive deficit abound and are then utilised to explain away educational failure. Arguments that once challenged the role of the school as an institution which resides within the superstructure, and its contribution to educational disadvantage, are in retreat. Instead it appears that the family, mainly mothers, are a feature of derision and blame for the perceived pathological tendencies in families. This is was a strong revivalist theme especially in the reporting of the recent spate of stabbings in the capital.

My original research on the topic of African Caribbean parents and their perspectives on education and schooling found parents obsessed with the notion of a 'good education'. They fought tirelessly and systematically to secure the best possible educational chances for their children. Sometimes they resorted to drastic measures, such as 'return migration' in their quest for better educational opportunities. This recourse to utilising transnational family connections within the wider African Caribbean diaspora, and other strategies, I argued, is a testament to parents exercising their agency and it gave an insight into the multifaceted nature of the lives of these women that run counter to the populist notion of what it meant to be African Caribbean parents, and especially mothers in modern Britain.

These parents, armed with their memories of the generational struggles of their parents and their own education, engaged in micro level strategies to overcome an overarching education system they deemed to be failing their children. These micro level strategies may be constrained by wider issues, for example, pertaining to the state and access to resources. Nevertheless, by engaging in these actions and asserting their agency they were trying to alter the dynamics of educational disadvantage. Mirza (1997) argues that such piecemeal actions may appear conservative but also radical since they are based on acts of social transformation.

This brings into focus the underlying dialectic between structure and agency. How do Caribbean women in the diaspora create a space between these two positions to mount a substantive challenge to disrupt the education system's status quo and contribute to an entity that fosters equality and social justice? Only then can all parents be assured that their children will receive a 'good education' and by extension contribute to sustainable communities.

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