Rajinder Dudrah (2004) 'Diasporicity in the City of Portsmouth (UK): Local and Global Connections of Black Britishness'

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Abstract

This article engages with the theoretical premise of diasporicity - the local/regional specificities and workings of a given diaspora. Diasporicity is an attempt to extend the vocabulary of the concept of diaspora as an intervention against fixed ideas of race and nation. The article tests the usefulness of some aspects of 'diasporicity' by applying them to the settlement of African, Caribbean and South Asian Black British groups in Portsmouth, UK. The article draws on qualitative research, including extended interviews, and offers a social commentary on Black British diasporic connections that are distinctive to this city and, at the same time, contribute to an overall idea of Black Britishness.

Keywords: *Black Britain; Diaspora; Diaspora Space; Diasporicity; Portsmouth*

Introduction

1.1 This essay considers the applicability of the notion of 'diasporicity' (Hesse 2000) to the city of Portsmouth, UK. It aims to do this by elaborating on Black British settlement and on the development of Black British diasporas in this south coast city.^[1] It also uses extracts from five extended interviews with Black Britons in Portsmouth, with ethnic origins from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, in terms of their commentaries about living in the city and their diasporic connections to other places. These actual voices are offered not as a corrective to the theoretically informed commentary of diasporicity but as an addition to elaborate further the area of cultural and social inquiry relating to urban diasporic spaces and identities.^[2] This article, then, is comprised of some personal observations and descriptions of Black British public life and cultural activity drawing on the case study of Portsmouth. Some of these observations are extended further and illuminated by extracts from the respondents that I have interpreted through my readings of them. Ward census data is also used in an indicative way to illustrate the numbers of Black British settlement in the city.

1.2 Portsmouth may not appear as an obvious and immediate example when one thinks of urban Black British settlement. Indeed, it is often the bigger cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds, with the largest Black populations that are almost always cited when Black British settlement is discussed in the existing academic literature on British race relations or in the mass media. However, and as the article goes on to argue, although the number of Black and minority ethnic groups are smaller in size in comparison to those in larger British cities, the example of the city of Portsmouth, where Black British communities are less visible, offers useful insights to think about the local lived experiences of Black diasporas as distinctive and similar in relation to an overall illustration of Black Britain.

The Concept of Diaspora

2.1 As a way of thinking about national identities in a period of unprecedented transnational movement, the concept of 'diaspora' has gained widespread currency in the humanities and social sciences (Appadurai 1990; Tololyan 1996; Anthias 1998). The term points towards a form of identity formation that is neither pure nor fixed, and that holds in play the experiences of migrant people and successive settled generations - their relationships with a country of origin and countries of settlement, and their diasporic consciousness or imagination that shifts between these two coordinates. In this way the concept of diaspora seeks to explore a social condition of actual and imagined cultural and social movement.

2.2 The notion of 'diasporicity' is an attempt at developing the vocabulary of the concept of diaspora, particularly in relation to understanding the distinctiveness and similarities of Black British diasporas (Hesse 2000). Diasporicity also pays attention to the social condition of diaspora through its local and regional specificities alongside its transnational terms of reference. Hesse invites us to consider the

diasporic interactions that are taking place between the local and the global in order to think further about how people of a diaspora activate their diasporic sensibilities. Diasporicity, then, is a useful theoretical premise from which to begin. In order to develop this premise there is a need to think through the important claims made by the author in particular instances; through actual examples of lived diasporas as a way of exemplifying and testing contemporary theoretical advances such as 'diasporicity'. The case of African, Caribbean and South Asian Black British diasporas in the city of Portsmouth will be examined in this article as a way of elaborating on the notion of diasporicity.

The City of Portsmouth

3.1 Portsmouth is an island-city located geographically on the centre-point of southern England's coastline, approximately seventy-five miles south-west from London. According to the 2001 national census of the city, Portsmouth has a total population of 186,701.^[3] Based on this information, approximately 5.3% of residents were from Black and minority ethnic groups - 9,819 people in total. This figure is comprised by taking into account the number of people who described themselves under one of the following census categories - Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other), Black or Black British (African, Caribbean, Other), Chinese, mixed ethnic groups, and other ethnic groups. This actual 2001 figure for Portsmouth's Black and minority ethnic groups is more than double its previous figure in the 1991 Census which stood at 2.6% or 3,658 people (Bassey-Effio 1999:4-5). The actual 2001 figure also exceeds the estimates that were forecasted by the Strategy Unit of Portsmouth City Council which suggested that figures for these groups in 2001 should have risen to 4.4% of the population, accounting for around 8,200 people (ibid:6-9).^[4] Furthermore, the 2001 figures do not take into account the settlement of refugees into the city in recent years. Portsmouth city council admits that the 'current refugee population in Portsmouth remains largely unknown' due to the lack of research undertaken in this area (ibid:13). Thus, the actual numbers of Black and minority ethnic groups in Portsmouth are probably higher than those indicated above. Nonetheless, the figures stated illustrate a small and growing multiracial population.

3.2 The city of Portsmouth is an interesting example to offer an account of how Black British regionalism displays a notion of Black Britishness that is played out at the local level for at least two reasons. First, Portsmouth might not appear as an obvious example to think about Black British diasporic affiliations due to the perceived idea that it is a predominantly white city with few Black and minority ethnic groups living there. In fact, upon my move from Birmingham to live and work in Portsmouth at the beginning of the year 2000, friends from the midlands and London asked 'are there any Black people in Portsmouth'?

3.3 Secondly, and related to this perceived idea of Portsmouth as "a white city", is the fact that very little is known of smaller Black British regional places of settlement in the UK outside of the major city conurbations like Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds, London, and Manchester. This is not to claim that exhaustive histories and research now exist of Black and other minority settlements in the bigger cities but that research around race and ethnicity in these cities is more comprehensive than the smaller towns and cities in which non-white people have also settled and made their homes. In fact, as Hesse remarks in his formulation of diasporicity, the fact that the numbers of settlement within Black British regionalism might be smaller than elsewhere, this should not preclude an analysis of them. As he puts it: Now although these developments [are] small and firmly located on the social and economic margins of Britain, the question remains, how shall they be contextualised? Is it the quantification of the Black presence that determines what meaning we assign to the discursive logic of its inscription in Britain? Or should this logic be constructed from conceptualizing the changing qualitative permanence of that presence? (Hesse 2000:101-102)^[5]

3.4 The response to Hesse's latter question should be answered in the affirmative. There is a need to uncover the regional particularities of Black British settlements which although may be smaller in numbers are equally qualitatively important in order to begin to understand the overall stories and illustrations of Black Britain.

3.5 Let us now consider some of the actual workings of diasporicity in the city. In particular, and by drawing on the qualitative research, the two dimensions of diasporicity, intra-national Black Britishness and transnational Black Britishness, will be considered in Portsmouth in the following ways.^[6] The historical settlement of South Asian, African and Caribbean people in the city will be offered as revealed by the respondents. A notion of Black British politics in operation through cultural and social welfare groups in Portsmouth and as described by the respondents will be offered. And finally, the local life worlds and vernaculars of Black British settlement in Portsmouth will be outlined by paying attention to the respondents' ideas about 'living in an island-city' and focusing in on a particular diaspora space, that of the multi-ethnic food store.^[7] By offering these aforementioned thematic issues that arose from the qualitative research, this essay aims to articulate some of the theoretical strands of diasporicity together as a way of thinking through and elaborating on the notion of diasporicity in a given locale. The strands of diasporicity

that are taken up are introduced as they are elaborated on. Overall, this article attempts to think through some of the local and global connections that constitute some aspects of Black Britishness from within the city of Portsmouth.

Black British Settlement in Portsmouth

4.1 Diasporicity invites us to consider the different settlements within Black Britain and how they are historically and regionally connected to the much longer and often neglected story of Black British history (Hesse 2000:114). In this respect, as with most other British cities with non-white populations, the history of Black British settlement in Portsmouth remains to be documented comprehensively. Black British history is often cited as a post-war phenomenon but the pre-war histories of Black settlement to Britain remain to be thoroughly charted. For example, in larger cities such as Birmingham, only recently has it been noted that the city's historical archives show Black people buried there from at least 1774 (Birmingham City Archives 1998).

4.2 There are no comparable records of pre-war histories of Black settlement in Portsmouth as yet. The earliest accounts of Black settlement in the city date back to the immediate post-war period in 1950. For instance, on 20 September of that year 49 Black apprentices arrived from Bermuda Dockyard due to its closure and to finish off their contractual ties. Most of them lodged with local people, partaking in the general social life of the city, with some even setting up their own jazz bands. Many struck friendships with local girls and several ended up marrying them. A few stayed on in Portsmouth but most of them eventually returned to Bermuda (Gordon 1996).

4.3 Unlike other major cities in the UK, Portsmouth was not an instant attraction for economic relocation amongst post-war Black Britons who were arriving from the former colonies. The immediate job shortages in industry and in the public service sectors were to be found in the capital and the cities of the midlands and the north. These cities soon became home to large numbers of Black people and post-war Black British settlement caused fear and excitement in the white imagination of the time; this has been documented well elsewhere (e.g. Fryer 1984, Gilroy 1987).

4.4 Relying on the accounts of the respondents, Portsmouth is a city that Black Britons moved to eventually after having lived in other cities before. A combination of the following two reasons for this settlement pattern was cited by most respondents. First, that the connections of kith and kin or friendship were the pull factor towards Portsmouth rather than the search for immediate employment. Secondly, that Black people having lived in larger cities were 'interested in moving to a quieter place with less rushing around and an easier pace of life' (interviewee Matilda). The following extract from my interview with Matilda^[8] is revealing in this respect:

RD: How long have you lived in the UK?

Matilda: I came here in '56, over 40 years now.

RD: You came over to work?

Matilda: Yes, in a sense. My husband then was here. Everybody was leaving the West Indies. Everybody was going to England - the grass was green, if you know what I mean, so everybody was coming to England. Because we were also British subjects that's why we came and there was a job shortage to fill. ... My husband came in 1955 and he lived in London. I lived with him in London for a year. Then there was the Suez canal crisis and people were being laid off. His sister was here, in Portsmouth, she was working as a nurse. And another friend of his that he knew from Barbados was in Portsmouth working in the dockyards. He used to come to Portsmouth for the odd day and gradually decided to come. I hated it, didn't want to come. I hated Portsmouth.

RD: Why was that? Matilda: There were no black people in Portsmouth. And if you come from the West Indies and then you lived in London and then to come to Portsmouth, there just were no black people in Portsmouth. There were just three black families at that time, including ours. If you went on Commercial Road [main high street] you'd be lucky if you saw another black person. You'd see the odd student, maybe, an African student. But then over the years you got used to it. I like Portsmouth now. I like to go to London but I don't think I'd like to go back and live there. I'm quite happy with Portsmouth now because Portsmouth has gradually got more and more black people. But colour's not a problem for me now as it was then, as I get on well with the Black and white people. After a while you get used to things.

4.5 Matilda begins by talking about moving to England in the mid-late fifties as part of a general trend of economic migration from the Caribbean to urban British cities. London was home to Matilda for a short while until her husband decided to join his sister and his friend in Portsmouth to live and work. Matilda

describes the initial shock of moving from London to Portsmouth where she and a few others were literally the visible minorities. London, like other larger cities, appeared to offer a safer haven compared to Portsmouth due to the racially hostile atmosphere generated in Britain around Black post-war migration and that an inception of a public sphere, conducive to the post-war Black Britons, was being generated in the bigger cities. Portsmouth, for Matilda, offered little in terms of this familiarity in the first instance. Her being able to feel at home and at ease as a Black Briton happened gradually as she settled into Portsmouth and as other Black people also moved into the area with their families. Over time, Matilda became 'a local Pompey^[9] resident', preferring the peace and quiet that the city offers compared with the hustle and bustle of London and the fact that Portsmouth is now also a multiracial city, even if not on a comparable scale to larger urban cities. This view was one professed by all the older respondents who are now settled in Portsmouth and with whom I carried out interviews.^[10]

4.6 In terms of South Asian migration to Portsmouth, the sixties and seventies saw the arrival of the Bangladeshis who now form the largest non-white ethnic minority group in the city. They initially arrived through the contact of kith and kin from neighbouring cities such as Southampton to settle, as well as from London and the midlands, and some were sponsored directly from Bangladesh through relatives in the seventies and eighties. This group went on to successfully open and maintain a localised culture of Indian restaurants that, like elsewhere in the UK, have changed the physical appearance of urban high streets as a sign of late modern multicultural Britain.

4.7 The seventies in Portsmouth, as elsewhere in Britain, also saw the arrival of East African Asians, mainly Hindu Gujaratis and Sikhs, who were expelled from Uganda (cf. Bhachu 1985; Brah 1996:30- 36). The local city newspaper, *The News*, covered a series of reports over at least a decade that testified to, and also fuelled, the orientalist curiosity and racism that this wave of migration caused in the local white imagination.^[11]

4.8 In the interviews that I conducted, stories and descriptions also emerged of immediate post-war Black settlement in Portsmouth that included struggle with direct forms of white-on-Black racism, ranging from name calling to outright racial violence. This was a similar pattern up and down the country during this period (cf. Hiro 1971; Fryer 1984; Solomos 2002).

4.9 More contemporary accounts of direct white-on-Black racism were also recounted in some of the interviews, though on the whole these were described as less frequent, and indirect racism or more subtle forms of racism was cited as frequently in operation in present day Portsmouth. The weeks after the notorious attack on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001 was also telling in this respect, as revealed in my interviews with Rajan^[12], Begum^[13] and Shahrulkh^[14]. As in other British cities during this turbulent time, people with brown skin colour or who might be considered as "Muslim-looking" became the target of conservative white confusion and resentment. All three respondents spoke of personal instances where they or some of their Asian friends were harassed in the streets of Portsmouth by being called the notoriously familiar 'Paki' or by the more recent addition to racist terminology, 'Binladens get out'. They also described finding themselves having conversations with some white friends where they were being asked to prove their loyalties to the West or to Islam. In Rajan's case this proved very difficult and troubling for him as he is not a Muslim. However, this did not stop some white people treating him as such due to the visible difference of his skin colour and their imposition of a mistaken cultural identity upon him.

Black British Politics in Cultural and Social Self-Help Groups in Portsmouth

5.1 Such descriptions of racial discrimination and the lack of a social climate in Britain that is able to deal with cultural difference sensitively and more inclusively, historically and recently, has led to the emergence and coalition of Black British politically informed self-help groups. Hesse's formulation of diasporicity describes this process as Black Britishness as 'recurrently politicized as forms of agency and identification'. This entails a notion of Black British politics as seeking an ideal of empowerment through community formations and values in the development of Black movements for civil liberties, social justice or economic liberation. Black community formations and values can take inspiration from the etiquette of practising politics from across the histories and geographies of Black diasporic locations (e.g. African-derived or -inspired values). These combine with, and at the same time offer a critique of, the workings of politics at the local level of predominantly white-controlled forms of governmentality (Hesse 2000:114-115). In Portsmouth examples include, amongst other groups that exist, the African Caribbean Cultural Association, African Women's Forum, Bangladeshi Welfare Association, Caribbean Islands Association, and the Pan-Asian Social and Cultural Organisation. Such groups have been founded for a number of years now by the post-war settlers of Black Britons to Portsmouth and offer advice and support to their members. Such groups also hold seasonal and annual functions that coincide with Western calendars, such as the new year and Christmas celebrations, as well those that tie in with aspects of their members' cultural identities, such as Bangladeshi Independence Day and Black History Month. These activities are often

open to the wider Portsmouth residents in which Black and white people are encouraged to attend, meet and communicate with each other in a friendly and festive atmosphere.

5.2 Each of these different Black cultural and welfare groups also network with, and members from each group sit on meetings of, overarching groups such as the Equal Voice Group, Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, Ethnic Pride, and the Portsmouth Racial Equality Action Group. These latter groups work together forming a broad coalition around local mainstream and cultural politics. They often share ideas and good practice, take an active role in the implementing of governmental legislation applicable to Black and ethnic minority groups, liaise with the city council on matters pertinent to cultural diversity, as well as allow space for Black dialogue to take place in a safe environment. Together the activities of these different organisations foster, in part, the creation of an alternative public sphere through which it is possible to mobilise cultural and political action for Portsmouth's Black Britons. Such action can be thought of further as enabling social agency as it empowers its members to partake and invest meaning in their areas of dwelling.

5.3 The role that these aforementioned groups served was acknowledged as 'important' and 'necessary' by most of the people that I spoke to. Theresa^[15], for instance, spoke of how the activities that they created provided a social and cultural outlet to 'just be', allowing her to engage with aspects of her being both British *and* Black, and to explore her cultural and intellectual affiliations with the African diaspora. She particularly expressed an interest in attending the discussion meetings that were arranged during Black History Month in October 2001 in which various cultural, socio-political and economic subjects were covered from a Black and third world perspective. However, Theresa, as did others, expressed concern over the lack of wider support structures from the local authorities to enable the successful development of the aforementioned cultural and social welfare groups, as the following extract reveals: Theresa: Throughout the time I've been here, since 1969, it's only in recent years that the council have appointed a Cultural Diversity Officer, on a part-time basis and now this year [early 2002] the post has become full-time. The fact that such change has been brought about is partly because of the Black groups themselves, voicing their concern to bring about change, because if we don't ask then nothing is going to be done. They will happily just let things slide. Although one knows that they must get a certain amount of pot of gold to effect the diverse arts and cultural activities labelled for ethnic minorities. But the visible gains are very slow to see. And the areas we want to be seen more in, like in the arts and culture, we seem to have very little support and this irritates me. We're often asking for money for space to help us to do it and the response is like 'we have other priorities!' But this issue is a priority too because they must be getting money for these, for us. And we are here saying 'help us to help ourselves, give us some money, give us access to buildings'. RD: Would struggle be the wrong word to use in terms of what you have just described to me? Theresa: Yes, it is struggle. It's a continuous, battle and everybody says 'oh, I haven't got any money in my budget', but there must be money, what are they doing with it?

5.4 Theresa feels that more could be done to encourage cultural diversity and understanding among the different ethnic groups in the city and she feels disappointed in her experience when dealing with the city council over these matters. The lack of funding from, and dealings with, the statutory bodies to promote cultural diversity issues is summed up as a 'struggle'.

5.5 During my interview with Begum (see footnote 13) the word struggle also comes up. In this part of the interview Begum was explaining how being a visible minority in Portsmouth was part of an ongoing struggle that involved the playing out of power relations that were to do with being positioned as a Black minority by being subjected to certain kinds of white scrutiny: Begum: If I'm not trying to explain myself in my work with white statutory bodies that Black mental illnesses are not genetically intrinsic, or with white acquaintances who are curious about black and Asian people and their cultures, it seems that sometimes I'm constantly trying to explain myself or who I am, or what the being a minority issue is all about. Sometimes you just have to laugh at these experiences but other times it's as if it's a constant struggle. RD: How do you mean struggle? Begum: It's like there are dynamics being played out in terms of the kinds of questions I'm asked, to do with who I am, in my work, or to explain myself to mostly white people. It would be good to just get on with each other and be allowed to be but this isn't always the case, and when you are a cultural minority and you ask for things to be done in a certain way that's sensitive or appreciative of your specific cultural or individual needs you're being put on the spot and asked 101 questions which seem as if they are about asking you to justify yourself which can be quite tiring. If that's not a struggle I don't know what is.

5.6 As Theresa's extract demonstrates, where a notion of struggle emerged as a talking point in the interviews it was described as articulated with the move towards establishing equitable social, cultural, economic and political chances for Portsmouth's Black and ethnic minorities as an ongoing issue in the contemporary present. Begum's extract further elaborates on a notion of struggle as including a sense of the power dynamics being played out at a structural level (e.g. white statutory bodies) and a socio-cultural level (e.g. questions being asked about cultural difference by white people) that are predicated around

Blackness being asked to define or defend itself in relation to whiteness. Here, whiteness remains intact, unquestioned and the dominant identity and Blackness is problematised and positioned as its binary opposite. This notion of an ongoing struggle to do with achieving parity among Black and white power relations is a common feature that recurs throughout much of the literature on Black British settlement as well (cf. Owusu 2000; Procter 2000).

The Local Life Worlds and Vernaculars of Black British settlement in Portsmouth: 'Living in an island-city'

6.1 In spite of the struggle for Black people to settle in Portsmouth, this is not the only defining feature of everyday Black British life in the city. In fact, as emerged from my observations and the interviews, Portsmouth has an identifiable and localised way of life that is acknowledged and shared by its citizens, both Black and white. This section, then, also elaborates on another one of diasporicity's strands that asks us to acknowledge that the national history of Black communities is lived out primarily at the local level that appropriates Britishness through regional Black 'life-worlds and vernaculars' with their distinct and similar diasporic affinities (Hesse 2000:114).

6.2 Being a city that is very close to the sea, with its geographical, historical, social, cultural and local idiosyncracies, was cited as the main feature that identifies and creates attachment with Portsmouth as distinct for its residents. This, for those that I interviewed and for others whom I spoke to in everyday conversation, gave Portsmouth an interesting sense of identity that can be summarised through the following list: The city covers a land area of approximately twelve square miles and is one of the most densely populated areas in western Europe, with some 190,000 inhabitants. This means that its residents all live in close proximity to each other. Portsmouth is also surrounded by the waters of the English channel. The Isle of Wight, which is visible from the coastline of the city, is connected to mainland Britain by hovercraft and ferry through Portsmouth. Portsmouth also has a large and busy passenger ferry and trade port to France and Spain. The city has strong historical ties to the maritime development of Britain providing a base for the Royal Navy.^[16] The coastline of the city stretches for approximately four miles. A shingle beach, bed and breakfasts, a small fun fair, amusement arcades, and a pier can all be found along its seafront. Portsmouth's island-city identity is further defined through the friendly banter which local Pompey residents often engage with people from Southampton, the neighbouring dockyard city 17 miles west of Portsmouth. It appears that there exists a friendly rivalry amongst residents of each city claiming that one city is a better place to live and for work and leisure, than the other. Portsmouth also has a localised accent that can best be described as a mixture between 'east-end cockney and south-west country' in terms of pronunciation.

6.2 This above description captures a sense of the generalities that characterise Portsmouth as a distinct island-city for its residents. The particular daily activities of the city's Black residents further indicate social activity and cultural practices from within the city that also contribute to an overall picture of Black Britishness. The following description of multi-ethnic food shops, catering to many in the city, is revealing in this respect. It is also telling of how Black Britishness is also transnational as it is connected to a migratory orbit of people's actual and imagined movements through family ties, personal interests, communications and travel to Black populations elsewhere in the world that consist of economic investments and cultural belongings (Hesse 2000:116).

The Multi-Ethnic Food Store

7.1 There are at least three medium-sized multi-ethnic food shops in the main shopping and business districts of Portsmouth in the areas of Southsea and in North End. These shops are all owned and run by family members across different generations from Portsmouth's British Bangladeshi community. The shop premises occupy and remake earlier shop spaces that were left vacant or sold on by former white owners. These food shops are located amidst other retail and business outlets such as high street banks, solicitors, clothes stores, supermarkets, post offices and so forth. What marks these shops as distinguishable and culturally different is the use of colours, written text, posters, and aromas that emanate from the stores' products and food displays that draw on signs and symbols from around the world. The shops sell fresh and packed food that has been imported from different parts of the globe. Tinned pickles, spices, vegetables, fish, meat, specialist breads, sweets and savouries are all available. In fact as one store advertises in bold writing on the sides of its delivery van, 'We specialise in Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African, Caribbean, Malaysian and Chinese food produce'.

7.2 One useful way to think about the multi-ethnic food stores is how they are able to display cultural difference as a feature that is local to Portsmouth, being located in the everyday rhythms and patterns of the city. Also, the signs of cultural difference are connected to, and supported through, the routes of Black British diasporas up and down the country and internationally. For example, many of the food products (e.g. lentils and spices) that these shops sell have been in transit, in some cases, for thousands of miles around

the world having been exported from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and elsewhere. These products are then processed and packed at factories in the major cities in Britain before being transported to regional warehouses and then to the supermarket chains and to local shops, such as the multi-ethnic food stores in Portsmouth. Asian, African and Caribbean transnational food trading companies such as TRS in Southall (West London), East End Foods Ltd and the Caribbean Island Bakery both in Handsworth (Birmingham) are all part of the economic trade routes of Black British diasporas. These companies sustain, and are themselves sustained by, the local shopping activities of the multi-ethnic food stores.

7.3 In the interviews, the multi-ethnic food shops came up as a talking point when thinking about actual diaspora spaces (cf. Brah op.cit.): RD: Where else in Portsmouth, besides the social and cultural events, do you think that there's a space for you to think about your self as British with connections to other places, like to your ancestor's place of birth for example? Theresa: The local Asian food stores are a good place, where we go for our groceries and spices. And in my interview with Shahrukh: Erm... my mum usually goes on about the Malik^[17] shop, or the Ejaz^[18] one. She says it reminds her of her back home, how they've managed to have lots of different foods that we'd find in Bangladesh too. I think she's kinda right.

7.4 The following extract from Begum (see footnote 13) perhaps best elaborates the importance of some of the interactions taking place at the multi ethnic food stores. Her account of the stores as offering a service that was used by different people for different purposes, and how the food products have become part of the everyday British cuisine, was interesting: Begum: The Ejaz food store has been around for a good number of years now. It was providing a service well before curry became the national dish in Britain and the big supermarkets started to sell food from all over. ... For me, it is a special place in that I'm making weekly or fortnightly trips to it, or to Malik's store, to buy my ingredients for my Asian cooking. It's kind of interesting as a lot of the recipes I make have been passed down to me by my parents and I have adopted them in my own way. All the different colours and smells also remind me of my time spent in Bangladesh, it's almost like shops over there in some ways but for shoppers over here. ... I'm always bumping into friends and relatives as well when I'm out shopping there so we manage to quickly catch up with each other. A few of my white friends also shop there. Over the years it seems to have become really popular amongst white people too. I've even recommended Ejaz's to one or two of my friends at work. ... I think it's a good thing that different people are shopping there, finding out about different foods and culture, but now and again you also see some white people in there who are not sure about the foods they want or ways to cook some of the vegetables so they ask you or the shop assistants. I think for some of these people it's like different, like wow isn't this colourful and exotic and that can be good but also bad too.

7.5 Begum's extract about shopping at the multi-ethnic food stores encompass a range of issues such as the stores' histories in offering a local service and products to its shoppers well before the national supermarket chains took an interest in marketing and commodifying specialised foods from around the world. Trips to the food shops are also articulated with a diasporic history as in recipes being passed down from kith and kin and memories of travels to the homeland being refreshed and translated in the food stores in Britain. The food shops are also a local point of informal contact where friends and relatives are often 'bumped into' and where a range of local residents Asian, black and white all shop. However, Begum, as did others that I spoke to, celebrated the diversity in the multi-ethnic food store with a slight expression of caution as some white people were seen as acting out a notion of their desires and fascination of the 'other'.

7.6 Begum's extract illuminates the findings of a number of recent studies that have argued how the buying, selling, preparation and consumption practices associated with the global trade of food can exemplify the social condition of diaspora in terms of being from one place and another simultaneously (e.g. Conlon 1995; Crang 1996; Jackson and Thrift 1995). Some of these studies have welcomed the transnational possibilities that the circulation and consumption of food can profess (Crang *ibid*; Jackson and Thrift *ibid*). Others, however, have warned that the consumption of food can also entail an exotic desire to metaphorically consume 'the other' - as in other cultures, other places, other people (hooks 1992). In this way, then, the multi-ethnic food shops in Portsmouth, as elsewhere, can be usefully considered as a diaspora space in which a number of social possibilities can occur. For instance, the shops make possible an actual connection between, and create possible contemplations about, the homeland and place of settlement through the importing, presentation, aromas, and preparation of different food products. The shops also serve different social groups' palatable needs. On the one hand these needs are to do with basic dietary requirements and pleasures for varied food tastes as articulated with one's cultural identity, as in for example the mixing and matching of British, Asian and other cuisines. On the other hand, palatable needs can also be articulated with an orientalist desire about consuming the other, affirming a neo-colonial framework in which non- white food products and services are consumed in a master-servant relationship by some white customers (cf. hooks *ibid*; Parker 2000). Thus, the multi-ethnic food stores can be read as a diaspora space where the flux of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes intersect and where

different subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed.

Conclusion

8.1 Diasporicity invites us to think about how Black British regionalism connects with a wider notion of Black Britain in national and transnational terms. The case study of Black Britishness in Portsmouth is an interesting one as the city might not appear as an obvious example to think about Black British settlement and Black diasporas due to the common sensical idea of it being a predominantly white city. However, the data and empirical material used in this article, to elaborate on the notion of diasporicity, demonstrates that Portsmouth has a small and growing multiracial and multicultural population (cf. the city's Census records), with its Black Britons having local and global connections. Furthermore, the post-war history of Black British settlement in Portsmouth reveals a different sense of migration pattern to that of other major industrial cities in Britain. The pull factor for Black British settlement to Portsmouth was one that was not the same as immediate mass economic migration from the former colonies as was the case for cities such as Birmingham and London. Most Black Britons arrived and settled in Portsmouth after having lived and worked elsewhere.

8.2 A focus on Black British settlement in Portsmouth also reveals an ongoing feature of Black British diasporas that consist of experiences of racism, cultural difference and the forging of hybrid and multiple connections and identities. In cases of racism and cultural difference these can be experienced at the level of being treated as a 'minority' or a secondary citizen and when this occurs it reaffirms the idea of Black struggle as a recurring aspect of Black British life. Instances of struggle can be dealt with through the organising and mobilisation of Black British politics through social and cultural self-help groups that are themselves informed by the ideals and practices of Black politics from around the world and by local cultural and mainstream politics within British cities. Cultural difference, then, can be designated by racist impositions (i.e. white derogatory readings of Black cultures), but more importantly it is perhaps better signified through the everyday cultural and social practices of Black Britons as about diverse ways of life that contribute to eclectic and late-modern definitions of Britishness. This is a notion of Britain that can be described through its amalgamation of more than one culture and identity and that resists fixed ideas about race and nation. In this sense, the diaspora space of the multi-ethnic food store is one example through which to think about the articulation of hybrid and multiple connections and identities through the importing, distribution, contemplation and consumption of different foods from around the world.

8.3 Whilst some of the empirical examples used to elaborate diasporicity in this article have been specific to the city of Portsmouth (e.g. the city's post-war Black British settlement history), others whilst localised from within this south coast island-city display cultural and social similarities that are also taking place in other cities (e.g. the cultural and social self-help groups, and the multi-ethnic food store). These examples help to illustrate some of the contours of local life worlds and cultural and political formations and hence develop a more detailed sense of Black British lives.

Notes

¹The terms 'Black British/Black Britain/Black Briton' are used in their post-war British usage as a collective term referring to a political identity of resistance and renewal. Here a notion of Black British political identity is formulated through the similar experiences of racial discrimination and strategies of anti-racism amongst African, Caribbean and South Asian social groups. It is in this context that I use the term Black throughout this article but where necessary I distinguish some of the social and cultural particularities between the different groups concerned. For an account of the history of Black British political identity see Alexander 2002.

² The empirical data used in this article was collected in order to examine and offer an analysis of diasporic belonging amongst African, Caribbean and South Asian Black Britons in Portsmouth. The work involved the use of extended qualitative interviews across different generations, participant observation methods, and social commentary on the role and nature of ethnic minority citizenship and diasporic affiliations from within a provincial southern British city. This work builds on the author's use of similar research questions and methodology though on a different topic, that of on the use of diasporic music, film and non-terrestrial television, in the city of Birmingham, UK (see Dudrah 2001: Chapter 3). For the Portsmouth research, fifteen extended interviews were conducted with people whose ages ranged from 14 - 64 years of age. Interviews were conducted after the use of an initial questionnaire survey that was used in a conscious attempt to identify respondents who wished to be interviewed further. Methods such as qualitative extended interviews are useful in the uncovering of marginalised voices. Extended interviews proved especially helpful in the case of this research where meanings of diasporic belonging and attachment to ideas of 'Britishness' were sought after amongst the respondents. Extracts and summaries from the interviews used in this

essay were conducted during February 2001 and March 2002. The five respondents used in this essay appear under pseudonyms of their own choice and are introduced as they are referred to.

³Figures taken from the Hampshire County Council 2001 Census website at:<http://www.hants.gov.uk/census/portsmouth/ethnicity.html>, date accessed 4 March 2004.

⁴ The Strategy Unit collaborates with local Black and minority ethnic communities in Portsmouth and is responsible for forecasting service provision needs for the city's population.

⁵ Hesse makes this comment by arguing for the need to uncover the marginalised histories of Black seafaring communities in Britain in the pre-war period. Nonetheless this comment has a wider conceptual resonance that is equally applicable to Black British regionalism in the contemporary present.

⁶ To consider Black Britishness as a form of intra- nationalism is to think of it in terms of a social movement that intervenes against the discourse of the nation state as a uniform imagined community. Intra-nationalism contests the idea of a tidy and monolithic national imaginary. The nature of different intra-nationalisms define and interrogate the terms of the national formation and its representation (Hesse 2000:114).

⁷ The term 'diaspora space' draws on the work of Avtar Brah who advances it as 'a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes ... where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed' (Brah 1996:208). Diaspora-space, then, can be considered as a cultural and social matrix in which it is possible to examine actual sites of diasporic operation within a given diaspora.

⁸ Matilda is a pensioner of 64 years of age. She came to England in 1956, following her husband who arrived in 1955 and who was living in London. Matilda travelled to the UK by boat from Barbados to Italy and then to Dover, spending a total of 17 days at sea. She worked in London making paints in a factory before moving to Portsmouth and working as a hospital assistant. She became a housewife for 6 years while she had her children and then went on to work for Portsmouth Aviation for 26 years before retiring. Matilda currently enjoys spending time with her family in the city, walking along the sea front on sunny days, and attending multicultural activities in Portsmouth that have been organised by local groups.

⁹ 'Pompey' the affectionate nickname given to the city of Portsmouth by its residents.

¹⁰ Out of the fifteen interviews that were conducted, 5 of them were from the 50 - 64 age ranges.

¹¹ See for instance a range of newspaper articles from *The News* archives held at Portsmouth City Library, Guildhall Walk, Portsmouth under the headings of 'Immigrants' and 'Race Relations' from 1968 to 1980.

¹² Rajan is male of 23 years of age who works full time as a trainee post office manager. He described himself as a British Indian, sharing political empathies with Black and Muslim groups in Britain. He has been living and working in Portsmouth for the past five years, having moved down from the midlands with his family. Rajan enjoys sports and recreational activities and prefers to listen to rnb and dance music. He is also part of a group that recently set up religious and cultural Hindu awareness activities for young people in the city. Rajan enjoys visiting and staying in touch with his relatives and friends in the midlands whenever he can, in person or via email and mobile text messaging.

¹³ Begum is a 25 year-old who describes herself predominantly as a British Bengali woman. She was born and brought up in Portsmouth with her parental family also living in the city. She is married to her white partner and has a seven year-old young child. She is employed as a mental health project worker in the city, working closely with Black groups around mental health issues. She described herself as being politicised through her work and coming across daily prejudicial attitudes about Black people from a range of different white people in statutory organisations. In this sense, and on issues of cultural diversity and cultural awareness training, she described Portsmouth as 'a backward city, taking several months, if not being a year or two late, in catching up with developments in the rest of the country'. Begum feels close to her family and enjoys travelling to Bangladesh whenever she can to visit kith and kin.

¹⁴ Shahrukh is a 19 year old A-levels student. He was born and brought up in Portsmouth and lives with his mum and dad and two siblings. Shahrukh described himself as 'a young British Asian male, a British Bangladeshi whose identities are still evolving'. He described feeling locally attached to the city, having grown up in Portsmouth with his friends also living nearby. He feels that Portsmouth is a city developing and coming to terms with its small yet growing racial diversity. He described a visit of his to the east end of London in Tower Hamlets to visit his cousins and feeling overwhelmed and excited by the visible presence

of other British Bengalis who had made a noticeable imprint on the east end landscape. Shahrukh enjoys watching Bollywood films now and again and enjoys listening to and dancing to pop and dance music in clubs.

¹⁵ Theresa is a 62 year old female. She is retired and manages a nursing home on a part-time basis that she helped to set up. She originally moved to England from Nigeria to study in Oxford in the early 1960s and then moved to the north of England for work, before moving to Portsmouth in 1969. She arrived in Portsmouth to start afresh after divorcing her husband, 'to get away from him as far as possible', and settled in the city with her two children. Theresa prefers the peace and quiet of Portsmouth compared to other bigger cities but enjoys making day trips to London for shopping and sight seeing when she can. She enjoys the theatre and meeting and catching up with friends. She takes an active part in the organisation of the city's Black History Month in October each year and works together with other Black groups in the city to organise multicultural events. She last visited Nigeria in 1993 and recalled feeling at home and not quite, the same way she sometimes feels about living in Britain as a Black person.

¹⁶ Portsmouth's maritime history does not have explicit connections with the slave trade in terms of the direct importing of slaves to Britain, as does other ports such as Liverpool. However, as part of the constructed maritime memorabilia and quaint Englishness that a few pubs profess along the harbour side sea front, one would be mistaken to think that Portsmouth had a direct connection with slavery. Copies of historical posters are on display in these public houses that unashamedly advertise the buying and selling of African and Caribbean slaves from British ports.

¹⁷ This is a pseudonym for one of the shops.

¹⁸ This is a pseudonym for one of the shops.

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