

Whose movement is it anyway?

Intergenerationality and the problem of political alliance

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*Your children are not your children;
They are the sons and daughters of
Life's longing for itself.
They come through you
But are not from you
And though they are with you
They belong not to you.
You may give them your love
But not your thoughts,
They have their own thoughts.
You can house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in a place of tomorrow,
Which you cannot visit,
Not even in your dreams.
You can strive to be like them,
But you cannot make them just like you.
Strive to be like them
But you cannot make them just like you.*

The Black feminist acapella ensemble, *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, first launched their version of Lebanese poet, visual artist and philosopher Khalil Gibran's 1923 poem, *On Children*, into the world of justice politics in 1988. A tender, loving and powerful statement that disrupts the assumptions and terms of the heteronormative family and the hierarchy of generational authority and power it inscribes and reproduces, whether these words are engaged visually through the eye as text, or sonically through the ear as song, the profundity of its injunction summons the reader/listener to attention as it poses surprising questions about an aspect of life that often

goes unthought and unremarked. That this is so is in many ways astounding since the terrain it disrupts is one that is central to many areas of social movement activism, including queer critique of heteronormativity and the coloniality of cis-gender normativity as the pivot of technologies of social and biological reproduction of the human.

And yet, despite *On Children* being a manifesto – or ethical directive – about social relations of generation, the issue of the intergenerational (familial-political-cultural) as a complex nexus of the distribution of heritage and obligation, gift and responsibility, seems strangely muted in the landscape of social critique and reimagining futures, at least as it plays out in the UK, the place from which I write, live, think, experience.¹ Some sense of why the call to attention signalled in *On Children* could be inferred from the provenance of the poem/song: the Arab world in the inter-war years; and Black feminist cultural production in the post-Civil Rights/Black Power years of the USA.

That these would have been, and remain, sites for the emergence of simultaneous critique *and* envisioning of possible futures relevant universally, i.e., beyond their immediate constituencies of production, was and remains unthinkable in the western critical canon. By extension, this is why (I might hazard) the lived alternative modes of relation across generations that are part of, for example, Indigenous sociality, and the cosmological models these might offer those wishing to disrupt heteropatriarchal conceptions of kin and kinship, are unseen, ethnically particularised and/or occluded by the self-referentiality of so much critical praxis organised

under the logics of western modernity and its framing of contestatory politics.

Located in a self-reflexive consideration of inter-generationality in the social movement activism of Black feminism in Britain, I want to take seriously the provocation of *On Children* and ask: what is the relationship between a preceding generation of activist/scholars and those of the subsequent generations who take up the baton, if not one of proprietorial birthing and authority? How can this relation be conceived and practiced outside of the unquestioned logics of heteropatriarchal kinship? What is the intergenerational ethical relation between and for both the 'parents' and the 'children'?

Two central questions arise for me. First, if each generation has its own thoughts, how can a temporal frame that is always 'now', and also one that simply repeats, be avoided? The now/repeat dilemma poses profound issues of vision and strategy. Struggles for social transformation in pursuit of justice and freedom always raise the challenge of how to draw from history whilst avoiding being constrained by it (a dilemma embodied in intergenerational dynamics). Analysis involves being able to chart and understand changes and how they occurred and locating moments of struggle in their time/space specificity. If always 'now' such analysis is occluded. A temporal frame of perpetual 'now' also erases the gains and impacts of prior movements for justice and freedom – for example, the ways in which current attacks on women's autonomy and bodily integrity are, at least in part, linked to the backlash for gains won by feminist organisation since the 1970s. By extension, this also forecloses analysis of the various ways in which power has responded – e.g., by a strategy of assimilation, marginalisation, pathologising or criminalisation, or a mix of all these. Somewhat paradoxically, a permanent 'now' also erases the particularities of perspective, political methodology and objectives of different generations in a particular conjunctural moment. In short, the specificities, continuities, discontinuities and entanglements between and across generations are lost and the danger of endless repetition, as opposed to development and/or refinement of praxis, becomes more pronounced.

This leads to a second question, one that I am devoid of even a provisional response, yet believe is pressing – i.e., how can movements of coalition and solidarity be sustained across difference, including the difference

of generation, and enabled to work ceaselessly toward freedom?

In accepting the challenge of disruption to the proprietaryity of lineage transmission, I propose that this involves a rejection of seeing Black feminist movement as a project of sameness, as if its development was a project of cloning, and instead requires re-casting of the intergenerational as a terrain of potential, ongoing co-alition. At the same time, this poses the challenge of how to develop ways of working, building and imagining together, across constituencies and spaces of specificity *without* surrendering the 'inter-am' of all life forms, so brilliantly articulated and theorised by Lata Mani in her recent book *Myriad Intimacies*.²

Against this background, my offering is focused on a moment of Black feminism in the UK linked to the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (hereafter OWAAD) and Brixton Black Women's Group (hereafter BBWG). OWAAD was a national umbrella network of women's groups from across the racially minoritised population – predominantly African, Caribbean, and South Asian; but also Arab, South East Asian, and Latin American. Toward the end of the piece and in less detail, I consider a small, dynamic community-based organisation of Muslims who work in ways that queer gender, sexuality, identity.³ In considering what these illustrate about the demands and possibilities of coalitional formations, I conceive the construction of spaces of coalition in the sense offered by Audre Lorde in her work on difference:

Difference must be not merely tolerated but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters ... Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.... Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that differences do not exist.⁴

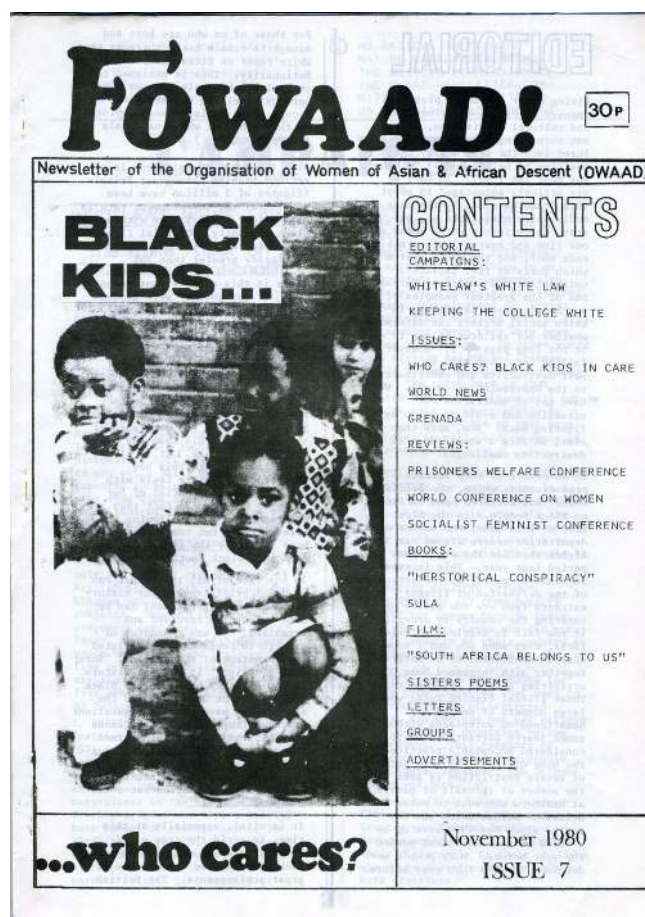
I cite this to indicate that I share with Lorde the idea that it is through difference that we come to form the most meaningful coalitions and 'otherwise' modes of relationality. And I share the understanding that this takes

work and love and care, particularly given the current context of neoliberal multiculturalist modes of governmentality, in which 'recognition' of cultural or ethnic identity is the ground of subjection in which racialised groups submit to their 'othering'. In such circumstances, the aim of coalition must exceed the call for 'recognition' by the state – recognition only made possible through modes of colonial/anti-Black/heteronormative intelligibility. It also exceeds the kind of 'respectful but ultimately disregarding listening' (so characteristic of EDI⁵ processes in institutions) and asks is there something more – '*Somethin Else*', as Cannonball Adderley might phrase it,⁶ that has the potential to disrupt whiteness in its guises as raced, gendered, sexual, classed and ableist normativities. This is something that requires us to respond to the haunting in the sense conceived by Avery Gordon and implement the 'something that remains to be done';⁷ that resurrects and deploys the modes of world-sense, to invoke Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí,⁸ that so many of us have forgotten we know and use it in our otherwise world making; something that hears and feels the kinetic vibrations in the sense of something 'set off' because it 'lands' viscerally and emotionally, sounding the otherwise knowing that vibes in the excesses of the flesh, to herald Hortense Spillers, via Ashon Crawley, into this space with us now.⁹

I should make it clear that if the above is the framing, more specifically/concretely, I am thinking of 'coalition' in a kind of double move. First, is that my query unfolds via the description of two kinds of coalitional practice: on the one hand, the more familiar kind that is linked to the generation of a feminism through the creation of organisations (or a movement) of various constituencies differentially racialised as minority, each with specificities of gendering, sexualisation and classed locations. OWAAD was one such organisation constituted in this mode. On the other, is the coalition generated from the work of people of different age-based groups (in a mirroring of parents/offspring) from within one faith-based constituency (itself characterised by its 'multi-raciality') to address questions of belonging, identification and community in the context of queer life.

I am concerned about these two modes because I wonder how it might be possible to think them in relation to one another as both structured by a kind of intergenerational membership and whose practice raises questions

of intergenerational relation, explicitly or implicitly. Finally, there is my concern to respond to the provocation of *On Children* that I referred to earlier – this is the issue of ethical responsibility between 'elders' and 'children' outside a logic of heteropatriarchal ownership and authority. To begin to disentangle from such a structure requires a practice of self-reflection and self-reflexivity if a capacity to see/imagine oneself in *relation* is to develop at both the individual and collective level and which is an irreducible precursor to impactful critique, as Lorraine O'Grady, African-American-Jamaican visual artist and theorist, tells us: 'self-expression is not a stage that can be by-passed. It is a discrete moment that must precede or occur simultaneously with the deconstructive act'.¹⁰



O'Grady is proposing the need for subjugated constituencies and subjects to bring themselves fully into the frame of visibility and analysis (for her, of visual arts practice). I am suggesting the double move of self-reflection and self-reflexivity as both adopting a stance of observation of self/constituency in situated positionality and relation; and a stance of reflexive consideration of the values, modes of relating that characterise self/-

constituency. I suggest this is a necessary prelude to deciphering the intersectional constellations of historical and contemporary social relations and practices, which would include their psychic and affective inscriptions, within which we are all embedded and which structure our relations. Such reflection/reflexivity augments structural analysis by opening a lens on the multiplicity of life forms with whom we are in relation, not only in structures of power and domination, but also in visions of future commons working to the logics of care, and from which movement towards living consciously as 'inter-am' can proceed.¹¹ Such creative construction of 'me-not me-always in relation' then becomes the generative, 'erotic' space that channels the deconstructive acts into a mode of creative pursuit of justice and freedom.¹²

When read alongside the earlier quote from Audre Lorde, *On Children* can be read as a teaching (and perhaps warning) as to the tasks that emerge in formations of coalition: the need to generate an image of the self out of a collective process of reflexive consideration as to what and who that is; the need to hold the partners to coalition as near, yet still separate from the self; the need to 'know' who each other are – the conditions of existence, narratives and visions of those 'not me' – and be open to what each offers; understand and hold in ethical responsibility practices of care and nurture outside existing hierarchies of value, authority and proprietorial relation; and the need to take seriously the concept of the 'generative' as a potentiality between generations. This latter has a direct relevance to political formations that are (by accident or design) constituted by cross-generational memberships, but the others are equally important.

So, this paper is an exploratory piece aimed at stimulating conversation about and development of a way of thinking about intergenerationality as a form of coalition. And since coalition work is demanding, requiring energy, the capacity for pause, and a willingness to look inwards to engage outwards – it requires a capacity for thinking, in order to foster the kind of collaborative transformation the pursuit of freedom demands.

My conception of 'thinking' is heavily influenced by two theorists, on the surface at opposing ends of the political/theoretical spectrum, but whom I read as echoing each other across the canyons of socially constituted, psychically lived hierarchical difference and disciplinary boundaries in regard to conceptualisations of 'think-

ing'. The two are Black, lesbian, feminist, mother, anti-imperialist poet Audre Lorde, and white, English, upper class, raised for his first eight years in India (under imperial rule) by an ayah, psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion.¹³ Both conceived 'thinking' as an apparatus developed to allow humans to process emotional experience and develop 'thoughts' from this 'thinking'. The root of 'thoughts' (channelled through 'thinking') is emotional experience – thoughts that come as emotions (feeling states) which themselves contain knowledge about the world (and the suffering the world imposes) but need to be processed and transformed into meaning. These emotions (vibrations) must be 'met' and engaged and made intelligible in ways that foster understanding and freedom. Since emotions contained¹⁴ by a mind capable of 'thinking' have this potential, they offer a way to know the world and its potentialities, prohibitions. As linked to the work of coalition, the issue is to constantly ask (oneself and one's co-conspirators), what are the experiences that need to be rendered intelligible and harnessed to the pursuit of justice and freedom? In other words, the 'thinking apparatus' needs to be deployed in this direction when considering coalitional politics.

With this in mind, let me come back to the arena of coalition building that is my concern here: the question of *intergenerational conversation, activism, theory-building*.

Why has this presented itself as an issue for me? There are probably two reasons (though since one never entirely 'knows' one's mind it is likely more overdetermined than that). We can begin with my age, since this is one reason why the issue of intergenerationality as a mode of coalition has become a concern for me. I am now an elder and despite the fact that, in being hailed as such, I often find myself looking round to find the elder being hailed, I now occupy a particular position within Black feminist political formations in London that require me to be one of the holders/transmitters of our history and use this to offer direction to younger ones. Though at one level an effect of individual life course, autobiographical history – which is never 'just' that, since all ways of storying lives signal the condensation of wider social, cultural, political and emotional patterns – and/or their contestation, this itself signals the challenge of coalition: how is it possible to speak with/walk with those that are me/not me in ways that foster movement towards freedom? That is, the very tasks of reconceptual-

isation signalled by *On Children*, as noted above. And to these we might add that thinking through the similarities and differences embodied in the various generations within Black feminist formation also helps to avoid a collapse of time into an ever present 'now' (as if nothing has changed or needs to change in the character or visions of the formation), and avoids producing a vision of Black feminism in Britain as an ossified formation, in some mirroring of the teleology of multiculturalist versions of contemporary British history. Rather, it articulates a need to evaluate shifts in visions and priorities in the light of complex intertwining of ideological, material, psychic, local, national and global conditions.

The second reason pivots around the link between personal and political formation as made material in the Black feminist, diasporic formation of which OWAAD and BBWG were representative and of which I was part. As a member, I helped build these, but more significantly they 'built' me; they enabled a differently embodied personhood outside of the subjectivities constituted by the multicultural coloniality of British governmentality and outside of the heteropatriarchal logics of authority and proprietorship. As a consequence, it helped reformulate my thinking apparatus as it offered a way to live in the heart of a declined but still kicking colonial centre of racial capitalism and its settler colonialist / imperialist / multicultural practices.

Development of my thinking apparatus in this way was, and must be understood as, an effect of collective organising and struggle, and not as an act of a sovereign individual in the image of neoliberal constructions of subjectivity. Following Lorde, it instantiates the fundamentally collective and relational roots of individual psychic development even under the pressures and violences of intersectional practices of power and subjugation.¹⁵ Following both Lorde and Bion, and located in the activism of OWAAD and BBWG, it also becomes clear that capacity for thinking – i.e., processing experience into meaning and thereby thought – is an ongoing, iterative process. Nevertheless, it could perhaps be assumed that I was well positioned for the pursuit of intergenerational political relation not premised on precisely the heteropatriarchal logics of authority and proprietorship that I critique.

Haha! If only, and here the need for continuous practice of self-reflection and self-reflexivity is illustrated by a way of thinking that I have which could precisely

open a disjunction between my theoretical claims and my political analysis of Black feminism in Britain as an intergenerational formation of me/not me. This is my tendency to think of our movement as a *continuous* project of *space-making and place holding*, i.e., that this remains an unchanged characteristic of Black feminist practice in Britain not just as a continuity of struggle but also because of a continuity of inheritance, in the sense that the 'children' do exactly as the 'parents' did. In the former, any quality of continuity is less vulnerable to prior generational authority or 'truth' about what is common to different generations in struggle. In the latter, an unreflexive assumption as to the aims, claims and effects of struggle (e.g., space making) as an unchanging feature, is more available to the logics of the very authoritarian and proprietorial practices I critique. And I can hold this view despite knowing that it is not necessarily true at all.¹⁶

Attempts to avoid such unreflexivity require openness and clear exposition of one's ideas and approaches, here in relation to the idea of space-making. By space-making / place-holding, I gesture to the disruptions to the orthodoxies through which racialised people have been named and made intelligible in the logics of governance and regulation by state institutions and media alike. This disruption also opened space for other modes and practices of personhood – ways of living Blackness and brownness in excess of the subject positions offered in terms such as 'coloured immigrant', 'ethnic minorities', 'settled communities' and 'BAME' (Black and minority ethnic) communities. Black feminist praxis was central to the processes of disruption and it was a profoundly coalitional movement – bringing together a variety of constituencies, and this was its place-based originality and power.

But: even if it is continuous, understanding how Black feminist practice moved, and deciphering and tracing when and where its punctuation marks¹⁷ occurred within and between specific generations remains a central question. And from there one might analyse whether, how and with what effects it is a continuity between an earlier moment linked to OWAAD and BBWG and contemporary organisations such as Sisters Uncut or Not Nowhere. If all four of these organisations are about space-making and place-holding, is this as a tactical manoeuvre en route to some broader objective shared across

the generations, or has this larger horizon changed? If so, in what ways; what challenges do they pose and to whom? Centrally, does my sense of continuity invoke a kind of assimilationist move that suffocates 'difference' (ethnic, sexual, classed, dis/abled and, crucially, age-based generational) and the capacity for thinking, and thus the potential for creative thinking? Or does adopting an analytical approach based on deep questions about what is continuous and how, open a space between generations that hold me/not me in ethical relation and capacity for generative creativity?



These are questions that haunt the landscape today, and though there is a great deal of looking back and archive building in the interests of knowing, documenting and learning from our history that is being undertaken, the driving temporal logic seems at times (to me) to be teleological, in the sense of working to a logic to chart 'progress' as opposed to understanding shifts in the registers and conceptualisations of what constitutes radical change and how it might be pursued. This, I think, makes clear another issue related to intergenerational coalition – how to know, name and reckon with shifts in project and vision that different generations bring to the

table of coalitional formation. What, if any, are the shifts in key logics, aims, organisational form and practice associated with specific generations? Ultimately, assessment as to the character and implications of continuity and/or change in project must turn on whether the practice is in the mode of 'business as usual knowledge production / presence making' with a view to making space for inclusion in unchanged terms of citizenship and national belonging, or whether the activism is informed by a desire to trace the formation and praxes of 'otherwise' emergent personhoods and relations (then and now), made possible by the generation of a methodology that disrupts the colonial apparatus of knowledge formation and all the hierarchies of human value contained therein. Such a disruptive intervention would work through a different spatio-temporal imaginary consistent with the wider practice of Black feminist scholar-activists working to a radical, not assimilationist, agenda. The details of this may be beyond the scope of the concerns of this offering, but it does intertwine with my focus on the question of in what ways and with what implications are relations among cohorts of different age-determined generations *coalitional* formations; and what does it mean for how we understand and evaluate legacy and responsibility, and our desires for reimagining ourselves, our visions and relations.

And here, despite my own cautions, I remain concerned to think about this in relation to two issues: that of space-making in the sense of crafting a space of production of new personhoods (subjectivities) crafted outside the logics of colonialist / racist / multiculturalist citizen-subject making; *and* spaces *into* which these new personhoods could flow as agents demanding radical transformation as part of a diasporic and internationalist praxis. The Black feminism of OWAAD was consistent with the latter in that it was a field of practice located in a specific national formation but *not* belonging to that nation. It refused the racialised/gendered categories by which we were 'known'. It had the effect, then, of crafting new personhoods breathing and living in old spaces differently constellated so that the spaces themselves were reshaped and could become new spaces.

So, one challenge in the early part of the second decade of the twenty first century, is in what ways are these new personhoods/spaces continuing to be brought into being? Are they the same as, different from, or overlap-

ping with the spaces/personhoods crafted in the 1980s and 1990s? Is this process of space-making an identifiable and core characteristic of Black feminist praxis in Britain across time? If so, where/why, and if not, does it matter? These may be the concerns of an 'elder', but perhaps, from the place from which I ponder, they resonate with the concerns of activists living and practicing in colonial-settler / anti-Black spaces in which similar racial logics of death, denial, expropriation, alienation and extraction structure relations of rule. But beyond this, and in attunement with other ways of knowing, being and relating, these concerns may open a pathway to learning from other cosmological frames and conceptualisations of heritage transmission, personhood and relationality (with all life-forms), enabling other ways of thinking and telling the story beyond any repetition or simple modification of the coloniality of authority, knowing, and relating.

But to shift back to the telling of my story from the vantage point of London, in the second decade of the twenty first century (by one modernist accounting of time), I want to address a second, related issue regarding intergenerational formation. This is how or what holds the formation that is Black feminism in London/Britain together now? At one time it was the sign 'Black' that did this work – not without error – but adequately enough to enable a vibrant coalitional formation of activism, radical analysis, rethinking, theory building and person-making. In this iteration 'Black' was a highly de-racinated / historically-located naming of the present conditions of and alliances among numerous diasporic and migrant/exile constituencies who shared a common condition of British (and United States) colonial rule and its violences. As I have written elsewhere, building alliance and movement under the sign 'Black' meant that:

in its multi-ethnicity and multi-nationality this Black feminism had already disrupted the national inscription of Black women's struggles and political visions. Thus, there was already a possibility that the modernist and colonialist logic of nation, as well as the modes of racist and sexual and gender subordination and exclusion connected with it, could be greeted as unintelligible, subject to critique and contestation from other, counter-discourses of belonging that had multi-sited trans-Atlantic and transnational provenance".¹⁸

The sign 'Black' held open a space for conversation and

practice across Africa/African diaspora; South Asia/South Asian diaspora; Arab world/Arab diaspora; central/South America/and its diasporas and within that make coalition with those in the Irish struggle.

All this opened the possibility of thinking, knowing and becoming differently – outside of the colonial and multicultural normativities by which we were all (in our variety) named, known and governed by the racial capitalist state. Significantly what this held together were both the specificities of anti-Blackness/brownness *and* colonialist logics more generally. Anti-racism and anti-colonialism were not seen as separate but indivisibly tied together and this enabled a mode of cross-national thinking and connecting in tandem with diasporic thinking and connecting.

Yet, as a sign with the power to interpellate numerous constituencies, bringing them together under the sign 'Black', this contained both the potential and challenges of coalition work. This animating power was sustained for a long time but began to erode under the material and ideological pressure encompassed in state policies and 'namings' of minoritised communities (referred to earlier); practices of multiculturalism and increasing logics of neoliberalism, in which a politics of affect was as central as the logics of individual 'sovereignty', self-regulation, and something called 'ambition' (to succeed in and be recognised by the status quo). In these conditions, which included state-organised competition for funding and 'recognition', the sign 'Black' came under pressure as a way to articulate the struggles of various minoritised communities and struggles against racism in its gendered, heteronormative guises.

In other words, what was a profoundly coalitional field began to fracture under the effects of a shifting nominal categorisation of the logics of assembly, identification and belonging (kinship), but also in terms of the constellations around which political mobilisation was organised. This was a shift that in part mirrored the distribution of state funds and services aimed at 'ethnic minority' communities in which anthropological concepts rose to the fore as a way of 'knowing' and treating racialised populations. Here 'culture' became predominant, and it tapped into a need for 'cultural' expression such that coalitional alliances broke up. But so too did 'sexuality' – as an erstwhile sublated category of identification and 'knowing' within Black feminism itself, its

unruliness burst out and led to a fracturing of various organisations, even as it fostered the formation of offshoot organisations and events, such as the Black lesbian group, or the Zami conferences. The latter shows that because we had made space all was not destroyed by the combined effects of suppression of difference within our movement and the rationalities and violences of state multiculturalism and modes of carcerality (immigration, deportation, mental health sectioning, CJS).

The space-making segued into place-making in different ways, one mode being the generation and practice of alternative onto-epistemological frames encoded in Black feminism. Modes in which what might be variously called ‘affect’, ‘feeling’, ‘emotion’ was a dynamic, albeit often unacknowledged as such. Drawing on Kara Keeling’s foregrounding of ‘affect’ in her theorisation of the impossibility yet urgent necessity for alternative visions,¹⁹ Grace Hong points to the place of affect in Black/queer feminist disruptions to neoliberalism: ‘... affect is one of the forces that somehow manages to exceed the present-day conditions of possibility to gesture to a different epistemological, if not ontological and empirical regime’.²⁰ I take this to mean that ‘feeling’ could provide the fertile ground in which knowledge-production might proceed differently whilst drawing on the varieties of ‘experience’ faced by various constituencies rendered surplus, without value and fungible. And since ‘experience’ is always socially and psychically patterned, and thus material/structural, along with being felt at the level of subjectivity, ‘feeling’ is both located and exceeds the logics of oppression/social death. ‘Feeling’ as I call it, or affect as Keeling and Hong call it, also travels/flows, making links between constituencies and different life forms as it is a kind of vibration (think flowers that produce more pollen as they detect the vibrations of honey bees!). In this sense, the combination of oppressive material structures along with the legacies and transmission of structures of feeling (if invoking Raymond Williams here is not too uncanny²¹), Black feminism was expanding as one generation (OWAAD, etc.) aged and younger generations identified with and expanded the size and visions of Black feminist constituency and redefined its analytical approaches and practices. This meant there was an increasing involvement in ‘intergenerational conversation’.

This was at once enriching – and exciting, certainly

in the increased visibility of queer/non-normative sexualities within Black feminist constituency – and raised those pressing questions articulated in *On Children*:

- how to discern, plot and understand what was new / what was a repeat; what was a repeat but with a difference; how to identify where the analytical heat lay and what identified as the most pressing social/political concerns; what was / should be the predominant mode of understanding the moment/present/conjuncture;
- how to make visible varieties of Black feminist generational analytic in the present whilst holding the history, noting the change, and not privileging one generational side or the other; but instead, using it as motor of creative development analytically and practically;
- how to discern what our respective responsibilities as generational cohorts were/are and how to understand how these are or should be distributed in specific contexts.

These intertwined with other concerns, such as the issue of the state; the implication of shifting the naming ‘Black’ to that of ‘Black and brown’; issues of the national, the postcolonial/decolonial, international; and the conceptual categories through and around which the current conjuncture was/is analysed and the understanding of contingent possibilities that this gave rise to. One might pose this tension as turning on how to address themes that foreground the suffering of systemic racisms, misogynies, class-based oppression, and exploitation, heteronormativities and ableism, *but not* to the exclusion of seeing and theorising possibility whilst generating modes of life-giving practice in Black and brown life. Thus, two things above all arise as central.

The first returns to my repeated refrain: how to conceive, build and sustain *intergenerational* coalition in ways that don’t simply reproduce/collude with the coercions of colonial modernity that underpins modes of racialisation in social policy, immigration and border control, and overall practices of governance:²² a conceptualisation of the intergenerational as a structure of hierarchy and linearity (succession) of authority and value. Second, and in more positive mode, this involves how to decolonise the conception of the intergenerational in ways that foster a profoundly ‘otherwise’ way of think-

ing relation across age-based generational segmentation and distribution of authorial value.

It is about space-making again – for otherwise personhoods, otherwise ways of understanding experience/wisdom/knowledge – cycles of life and relationality. A way to practice intergeneration that simultaneously has a profoundly different conception of kinship and what constitutes ‘kin’; and allows for responsibility to the ancestors and spirit; enables the current generations to be good ancestors in the now/making; praise and take guidance from the ancestors and the grandchildren here and yet to come. Rephrasing this as a query as to how to do this in a way that contributes to the interruption of the spatio-temporal coordinates of colonial onto-epistemology – coordinates that Denise Ferreira da Silva identifies as ‘separability, sequentiality, determinancy’²³ – shows how the question of intergenerationality is as much about the social relations of ‘kin’ as it is of politics and constituency.

I want to conceptualise the intergenerational as a process of making whereby a different constellation of elements signalled in the notion of ‘a third’, as yet *unknown*, is conjured through the interactions of different age cohorts. In this, age is understood as intensity of experiencing in specific times, in the arena of specific constellations of elements that structure and propel to the fore specific social/political urgencies. Then the emphasis in the word intergenerational is precisely on *generation* – with the emphasis on ‘bring about’, ‘effect’, ‘prompt’ as opposed to ‘procreate’. What is generated in the process of cross-cohort relating and how does this object / these objects foster moves towards freedom – or not! And part of this move towards freedom will be the unsettling/disruption of colonial conceptions of generationality with its emphasis on linearity, hierarchal authority, heteronormative understandings of kinship. It will also be grounded in and propelled by ‘feeling’/‘affect’ and this links back to my point earlier about how I conceptualise ‘thinking’ – for not only is ‘feeling’ / emotional experience the generating ground for the need for thinking, but it also foregrounds ‘suspension’ as central to a decolonial disruption – suspension of knowing, of future end point; abandonment of the phantasy that to be Human is to be in command of all that is, has been, will be.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson tells us that the Mi-

chi Saagiig Nishnaabeg have a word – *kobade* – about which she writes:

According to elder Edna Manitowabi, *kobade* is a word we use to refer to our great-grandparents and our great grandchildren. It means a link in a chain – a link in a chain between generations, between nations, between states of being, between individuals. I am a link in a chain. We are all links in a chain ... [So the]... nation Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg-ogamig [is not only] the place where we all live and work together [but also] ... an ecology of intimacy.²⁴

This is a beautiful, profoundly ‘otherwise’ way of conceiving the connection between generations, and it emanates out beyond the orbit of fore-parents and their offspring, thereby disrupting the temporal logics of linearity – and thus ‘progress’, ‘improvement’, ‘modernising’ (terms that have been central to the armoury of valorisation by which coloniality has ordered and governed the world). It offers a profoundly decolonial way into intergenerationality as it makes space for different linkages and personhoods/life-forms. If I use this to reframe my emphasis on the generating potential in intergenerationality, the centre of conceptual gravity shifts to *practising* intergenerationality as a gifted responsibility in which the before, the present and the future co-exist in a kind of spiral time, constellating ages, locatednesses, experiences, human-extra-human life forms in a mode of radical sharing, responsibility and hospitality – even within the context of a declined but still colonial state / national formation called the UK, where I work from, or Turtle Island in its manifestation as Canada, where Simpson works from.

And so enter the anonymous, non-profit queer / feminist / faith community-based organisation (with which I sometimes work) and which manifests something of a disruptive intervention in generative ways. Its membership is of radical Muslims who queer multiculturalist logics, heteronormative interpretations of the holy book, and gendered exclusions in prayer, and age-based hierarchies of authorial voice, whilst being respectful of the elders. The aspect of the work of this non-profit I am referring to aims to provide a space of care for:

- queer ‘children’ who practice faith and are grounded (or want to remain) in their communities, whilst not being excluded from collective prayer or their families;
- parents of these queer children who are struggling with their queerness and worrying that it is ‘haram’ and goes against the holy book, but who do not want to disown or coerce their children – want to find a way to reconcile their desire to hold with their fear;
- both parties need containing – in the sense of being held so that they can transform feelings into thoughts via a process of relational holding and thinking and refuse the disruptions to their connectedness resulting from the imposition of heteronormative, religious interpretation and the logics of neo-liberal multiculturalist governance;
- this ‘thinking’ (containment) is in communion with others in prayer and guided by both an imam (woman or man) and a ‘secular’ volunteer;
- content involves interpreting the book and word in other ways, also informed by an understanding of the social/cultural positionalities in place-based specificities;
- workshop format – which is collective and iterative, and operates as a ‘thinking space’ in which no generation, no gender, no caste has a privileged entitlement to speak/explore.

This is deeply challenging work, so the organisation calls on people ‘outside’ to help them bring into clearer view some of the dynamics (emotional and relational), and to process and understand them so that all participants may go again armed with the learning, support, gifting and receiving they have been offered. The intergenerational generates new modes of praxis and new challenges and circles out to build coalition ‘within’ and across constituencies.

This brief description of one aspect of this organisation’s work shows how it is possible to disrupt the spatio-temporal logics of colonial modernity by mobilising the creative potential of intergenerational dialogue around queer desire and modes of living within the constraints of specific forms of cultural knowing and forms of racialisation. With the hope that I am not being too precocious, it enacts an ecology of intimacy as described by Simpson in her exposition of Nishnaabeg Brilliance:

The Seven Fires creation story sets the parameters for Nishnaabeg intelligence: the commingling of emotional and intellectual knowledge combined in motion or movement, and the making and remaking of the world in a generative fashion within Indigenous bodies that are engaged in accountable relationships with other beings. This is propelled by the diversity of Indigenous bodies of all ages, genders, races and abilities in attached correlations with all aspects of creation ... [This involves struggle] because this way of living necessarily continually gives birth to ancient *Indigeneous* futures in the present.²⁵

And as a link in the chain of feminisms emerging from Black, brown and other constituencies racialised as of colour from OWAAD and BBWG to today? Perhaps the micro-level, almost quotidian, practice of this small organisation re-frames but continues its inherited but not privileged agendas of space-making in the interstices of state devalorisation, surveillance, abjection; place-holding for new/different personhoods to emerge, that disrupt the prevailing logics of separation, sequentialism, determinacy; hold open and work with/to the generative potentials of difference, in the sense offered by Lorde. And in this, perhaps the nominal sign under which they convene and have identification with doesn’t really matter, and is just the wistfulness of an aging Black feminist with a foot in the then and now of Black feminist coalition in London. And finally, in the here-and-now of this moment of engagement between reader’s thoughts and mine as written ...? Let’s keep talking.

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Notes

1. I exclude from this statement the centrality accorded intergenerationality in scholarship and policy considering the impact of abuse of all kinds on family dynamics, such as in the psychodynamic and sociological study of trauma and/or domestic abuse. In addition, intergenerational relationships are of concern in the social policy, gerontology and geriatrics literature concerned with the distribution responsibilities between children and the state for the care of aged and/or disabled elders/parents. See, for example, A. Walker, ‘The Politics of Intergenerationality’, *Z Gerontol Geriat* 35:4 (2002), 297–303.

- 2.** Lata Mani, *Myriad Intimacies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).
- 3.** The organisation will remain anonymous for reasons of confidentiality.
- 4.** Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider* (New York: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984), 111–112.
- 5.** EDI is the acronym for Equality/Equity, Diversity and Inclusion commonly used within academic and corporate institutions in the UK at present.
- 6.** Or 'sound it'. Cannonball Adderley, saxophonist, released his album *Somethin Else* in 1958 on Blue Note. Miles Davis plays trumpet on it; other musicians are Hank Jones, Sam Jones and Art Blakey. Just listen to how Adderley subtly disrupts in his renditions of 'Love for Sale' or 'Autumn Leaves'!
- 7.** Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- 8.** Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónké, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- 9.** Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book' in *Black, White and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003/1987), 203–229; Ashon Crawley 'Stayed|Freedom|Hallelujah', in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, eds. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro and Andrea Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 27–37.
- 10.** Lorraine O'Grady, 'Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity' in *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, ed. Grant H. Kester (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 272.
- 11.** Mani, *Myriad Intimacies*, 2022.
- 12.** Audre Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' in *Sister Outsider* (New York: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984), 53–59.
- 13.** Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic'; and 'Poetry is Not a Luxury' in *Sister Outsider*, 36–39; Wilfrid R. Bion, 'The Psychoanalytic Study of Thinking' in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 43:4-5 (1962), 306–310.
- 14.** Here I do not mean 'containing' in the sense of restriction, but I am using it in a way indebted to Bion's conceptualisation of 'containment'. Containment in this psychoanalytic theorisation is a live process between two minds (modelled on the relation between infant and maternal object) connected through unconscious communication. It involves the projection (psychic expulsion) of unbearable states of mind (often physically embodied) into the mind of another (the container) who has the capacity to receive, hold and process (make sense of) these states of mind. Then, when ready, the projection is given back to the projector in a way that can be tolerated by them. In this processed/held state the emotional experience that was unbearable is now intelligible and thus stripped of its terror-inducing force, making the experience amenable to 'thinking', made intelligible and can become a 'thought'. This capacity, for what Bion termed alpha function, becomes a feature of psychic life, though ongoing replenishment is required too as it is not established as a once and for all, lifetime achievement.
- 15.** Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic' and 'Poetry is not a Luxury'.
- 16.** See Gail Lewis, 'Visions of Legacy: Legacies of Vision', in *Transatlantic Conversations: Feminism as Travelling Theory*, eds. Kathy Davis and Mary Evans (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 167–182.
- 17.** Here I invoke David Armstrong, systems, psychodynamic theorist of organisational process and relatedness, who conceived institutional roles, statuses and the emotional meaning attached to them by the organisations' membership, as a kind of grammar in which interpersonal space was punctuated. See Armstrong, *Organization in the Mind: Psychoanalysis, Group relations, and Organisational Consultancy* (London: Karnac, 2005), 52.
- 18.** Lewis, 'Visions of Legacy: Legacies of Vision', 176.
- 19.** Kara Keeling, 'Looking for M-: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15:4 (2009), 565–582.
- 20.** Grace Kyungwon Hong, *Death Beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 15; citing Keeling, 'Looking for M-'.
- 21.** Raymond Williams, 'Preface to Film' in Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama Ltd, 1954).
- 22.** Keguro Macharia, *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).
- 23.** Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'On Difference Without Separability', *32nd Bienal De São Paulo Art Biennial: Incerteza Viva*, (2016), 57–66, available at: <https://issuu.com/bienal/docs/32bsp-catalogo-web-en>.
- 24.** Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 8.
- 25.** Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 21.