

# *Forging connections: anthologies, arts collectives, and the politics of inclusion*

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## **24. Forging connections: Anthologies, collectives, and the politics of inclusion**

The late twentieth century saw a remarkable phase of collaborative activity by writers of black and Asian heritage in Britain. Individuals worked together to share resources and secure audiences, in groups configured by location or common identity. This was also a period of concentrated anthologising; such publications were often a direct output of specific collectives. This chapter reflects on the politics of inclusion – the complex questions of definition, naming, and participation – that inform these rich histories. Inevitably, such a task involves its own acts of exclusion and omission; this chapter cannot pretend to offer an exhaustive account. Not only are the following pages necessarily finite in scope, but some source material is simply unavailable: various texts are out of print, and some of the information in circulation is contradictory. Instead, this chapter seeks to signal the range and diversity of the field it surveys – echoing a sentiment expressed in many of the anthologies discussed.

### **Developing and defining the field**

The habitual celebration of particular literary figures (such as Salman Rushdie and Zadie Smith) obscures the broader picture of black and Asian arts activity in Britain. As James Procter laments, such ‘solitary writers [...] have almost been canonised out of, or at least seem peculiarly resistant to, incorporation within a communal black British framework’.<sup>1</sup> To correct the overrepresentation of such individuals this chapter remembers some of the many relevant writers’ groups, theatre companies and other arts co-operatives, informed by and examining some of their collective publications.

Perhaps the earliest of these groups was the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association, formed in London in 1934.<sup>2</sup> Though many members were resident in England the association focused on Indian literature and politics, looking to India as home: founding member Sajjad Zaheer returned there in 1936, taking the organisation with him. As earlier chapters in this volume demonstrate, there followed a dramatic increase in migration from both South Asia and the Caribbean in the years after World War II, as Commonwealth citizens encouraged by the 1948 Nationality Act ‘voyaged in’. It took some time before these new Britons began to organise politically, and required a shift in self-perception: from migrant workers in a temporary home to permanent citizens planning a future. Specific – and, sadly, tragic events – were eventually to catalyse action: the vicious attacks by so-called ‘Teddy Boys’ against members of the Caribbean population in Notting Hill in 1958, to which Trinidad-born activist Claudia Jones responded by

organising the first Carnival; the racist murder of Gurdip Singh Chaddar in Southall in 1976, after which Jatinder Verma founded British Asian theatre company Tara Arts. Most of the early organisations focussed directly on addressing community issues rather than developing creative practices – though the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (founded 1978) did incorporate poetry readings as part of their conferences.<sup>3</sup> Cultural historian Kwesi Owusu records the growth of a ‘rich infrastructure of community self-help projects, supplementary schools, advice centres, study groups and campaigns [...] newspapers or news sheets [...] workshops and stalls in the community’.<sup>4</sup> Such groups gathered by necessity, working towards a common goal; their shared experiences of racism preceded and produced their (racialised) collectives.

The 1960s saw the formation of the Caribbean Artists Movement (1966; see Chapter 15 by Chris Campbell) along with the earliest anthologies of writings by black and Asian Britons. Many of these first publications prioritised poetry: examples include P.L. Brent’s *Young Commonwealth Poets ‘65* and John Figueroa’s *Caribbean Voices: An Anthology of West Indian Poetry* (1966). The titles of these texts not only describes the content but name the contributors’ relation to Britain, using identities particular to the emigrant such as ‘Caribbean’, ‘Commonwealth’, ‘Africa’, and ‘Asia’. Such terms subsume allegiance to a singular nation, mobilising instead a political solidarity with which to speak back to post-imperial Britain. Brent’s anthology, for example, gathered works by writers from the diverse locations of Australia, India, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Zambia – among others. Demonstrating the struggle for appropriate terminology, a phase of some awkward collocations ensued: examples include the idiosyncratic ‘Westindian-British’ adopted by James Berry for his 1984 poetry anthology *News for Babylon*.

Perhaps inevitably, London was a centre for this collaborative activity. Its migrant populations enjoyed a liberal political climate shaped by the Greater London Council (led by Labour between 1973-77 and 1981-86) and relatively ready funding from the Greater London Arts Association (1966-1996).<sup>5</sup> But beyond the capital other artists were also forging connections. To promote black writers in the North West Lemn Sissay formed Cultureword – a sub-group of the writing development association Commonword – in Manchester in 1986. Out of Cultureword came Identity writers’ group and the women’s collective BlackScribe. Manchester was also home to Black Arts Alliance (BAA), formed in 1985, who curated mixed-media shows and ran training events and conferences; BAA’s legacy continues today in the form of National Black Arts Alliance, who maintain a library and resource centre in Manchester dedicated to documenting black arts in the region. In Liverpool black women’s theatre company Assati was formed, whose productions included *Soul Sisters Melody* (1993, Everyman Theatre, directed by Deborah Yhip). Birmingham enjoyed ten years of Brumhalata Intercultural Storytelling Theatre (1996-2006), founded by Vayu Naidu. One of the longest-running South Asian arts organisations is Kala Sangam in Leeds, which

maintains a successful arts centre today. Recognising the importance of regional outreach, the Asian Women Writers' Collective (1984-1997) pioneered a postal membership service so that writers outside London could receive feedback on their work; as a result, their 1994 anthology *Flaming Spirit* features stories authored in Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, and Cardiff.<sup>6</sup>

The 1980s witnessed a significant shift in self-identification, as both arts collectives and anthologies adopted the (often capitalised) term 'black'. This functioned as a strategically inclusive description of all who shared experiences of racism in Britain – rather than a common origin, and regardless of wide-ranging histories and heritages. As one interviewee asserts in *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (1985), the term 'doesn't describe skin colour, it defines our situation here in Britain. We're here as a result of British imperialism, and our continued oppression in Britain is the result of British racism.'<sup>7</sup> In this understanding, 'black' was an identity to be consciously claimed rather than a biogenetic fact. It was a contextualised response to a prior problem, rather than an articulation of an ahistorical essence. Though the term remained subject to continuous critique, it functioned as a necessary fiction – an example of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has memorably termed 'strategic essentialism' – serving to effect unity and solidarity.<sup>8</sup> As Rhonda Cobham observed of the Indian, African and Caribbean-heritage contributors to her co-edited collection *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain* (1987), 'the further the writers got from "Home" the more responsive they seemed to become to the possibilities of interconnection between a range of Black voices that extended far beyond their immediate cultural experience'.<sup>9</sup> The concept of a diasporic 'black' community indexed a further shift in status for Britain's migrant populations and their descendants, towards a self-consciously oppositional stance. As Fred D'Aguiar explains of his 'black British' section in *The New British Poetry* (1988), the term articulates 'a strong sense of being "other" than what is lauded as indigenous and capitally British'.<sup>10</sup>

This inclusive use of the term 'black' worked not only to promote horizontal allegiances among peer populations in Britain, but also to compress history and geography. In Paul Anthony's poem 'This History Maker' – collected in the anthology *Times Like These* (1988), produced by the Obatala publishing collective, of which Sandra Agard was a member<sup>11</sup> – the shared designation 'black' enables the speaker to identify across centuries and continents with the citizens of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Israel.<sup>12</sup> This practice was not reserved only for the poetic imagination; the editors of the sociological study *The Heart of the Race* adopt the first person plural 'we' in their historical introduction, collating the experiences of centuries of black people across Africa and the Caribbean. This collective identity inscribes an enduring connection between the people of the diaspora, and asserts continuing resistance to the spectrum of white supremacist violence, from historical European colonialism and practices of enslavement to the related hostility of post-war

Britain.

But the experiential usefulness of the term 'black' proved limited; while it powerfully aligns those who share the experience of racism, lived experience also demands recognition of the specificity of nation, language, culture and religion. Resistance to the subsuming effects of the term 'black' gradually grew, among British Asians in particular. The Asian Women Writers' Collective chose not to include 'black' as part of its designation when it formed in 1987,<sup>13</sup> and in 1988 the Commission for Racial Equality advised that the term should no longer be used to describe people of South Asian origin. No term is totally stable, however, and 'South Asian' has also been interpreted variously; in *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry* (2000) its usage refers not only to poets from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka but also to those from Caribbean and African countries with a significant Indian population, justifying the inclusion of Guyanese writers David Dabydeen and Zorina Ishmail-Bibby.

Despite such usages passionately dividing opinion, some postmillennial anthologies continue to invest in a political definition of 'black'. Most recently, the term titles Peepal Tree's *Filigree: Contemporary Black British Poetry* (2018) and its earlier partner anthology *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories* (2015). Contributors to the latter include Monica Ali, born in Bangladesh, and Lynne E. Blackwood, who self-describes as Anglo-Indian. Editor Jacob Ross does not discuss his operative definition of the titular term, commenting instead that anxiety over identity has faded.<sup>14</sup> Such attempts to refocus public debate may be motivated to make new conversations possible, and heterogeneous solidarity certainly remains vital. However, given the racialised fissures widening in the contemporary world – the inhumane treatment of people fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East to seek refuge elsewhere; the impenitent displays of Islamophobia by the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America – nuanced discussions of 'race' and racism seem more necessary than ever.

### **Anthologising as Activism**

With a shared identity established – however provisional – arts collectives sought to cultivate appropriate audiences. Anthologies proved a particularly popular medium, demanding little prior knowledge and introducing readers to a body of work at relatively low cost. Anthologies establish both presence and credence; as Barbara Korte has observed, they 'shape readers' conceptions of what [literature] is (or is not)'.<sup>15</sup> Some black and Asian writers were included in mainstream anthologies, giving guaranteed access to a white audience; Korte comments of *The New British Poetry* (1988), for example, that it 'helped to establish "Black" poets as a voice in British poetry'.<sup>16</sup>

But between 1970 and 2000 more than sixty anthologies of black British and British Asian writing were published, making this visible as a substantial, cohesive, and independent literary field. The urgency was palpable. Such publications were understood as a political intervention, a necessary response to the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Britain's black and Asian populations. As publishing collective Black Womantalk (established in 1983) expressly stated, its mission was to 'creat[e] the space and the means for our voice to be heard'.<sup>17</sup> An anthology can be understood as a form of public protest; its chorus of voices is a literary equivalent of a mass of people demonstrating in the street.

Anthologies promote writings that may otherwise go unpublished, and preserve those which may otherwise become ephemeral. T.S. Eliot recognised the format to be important for those he called the 'minor poets', though we might also understand *minority* writers as particularly at risk of being forgotten – especially those published by specialist presses, with a small circulation, in texts unlikely to be reprinted.<sup>18</sup> Anthologies thus fulfil the first objective of cultural production, as identified in Stuart Hall's famous essay 'New Ethnicities': 'the question of *access* to the rights to representation'.<sup>19</sup> The emphasised term also appears in Zhana's introduction to *Sojourn* (1988), an anthology motivated 'to provide access to publishing for women who might not otherwise have it'.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately the publishing industry has not changed substantively in the decades since these statements; in her introduction to *Ten: New Poets* (2010) Bernardine Evaristo identifies continuing barriers, including the enduring expectation that a writer will represent 'The Black Voice'.<sup>21</sup> Refusing this and other burdens, anthologies return control directly to black and Asian writers and their advocates. Along with independent presses and publishing networks (see Chapter 17), anthologies provide visibility and vital means of self-representation.

What anthologies achieved through publication and print circulation, performance poetry accomplished with a live audience. This immediate and relatively inexpensive platform offered poets the opportunity to connect directly with their publics. The Radical Alliance of Poets and Players (RAPP) was founded in 1972 by Jamal Ali, to produce group-devised poetry, drama and music rooted in the Brixton environment. Importantly, its work had an audience of both fellow Caribbean migrants and the white British population.<sup>22</sup> Another collective, African Dawn, was formed in the 1980s to recover the pan-African principles of orature in reaction to the Western privileging of the written word. As the Wazalendo Players it mounted several productions including Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, performed at London's Africa Centre in 1984. African Dawn also issued cassette recordings of poetry recitals with musical accompaniment.<sup>23</sup> Co-founder Kwesi Owusu recalls that audience interaction was vital to the collective's work, as part of the process of developing a piece and in the form of spontaneous commentary and invited call-and-response during the resulting production.<sup>24</sup> Engaging directly with audiences politicised the

community and began a dialogue that could be continued in print. In some cases live poetry events were a necessary precursor to publication: as the editors of *Black Women Talk Poetry* (1987) recall, ‘We held several open readings for Black women and slowly they were persuaded to part with their writings’.<sup>25</sup> The same editors ran a more formal programme of short story writing courses, funded by Greater London Arts, to develop material for their next collection.<sup>26</sup>

Grouping contributors by their shared experience of racism in Britain gave anthologies a didactic purpose: to educate a naïve audience. As Earl Lovelace wrote in his cover note for *Burning Words, Flaming Images: Poems and Short Stories by Writers of African Descent* (1996), the poems sought to ignite ‘an aesthetic fire that will announce their presence certainly to Britain’.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, one of the few commonalities Fred D’Aguiar admits of his eclectic selection of black British poetry is that ‘All these poets have a sense of public address’.<sup>28</sup> The lesson of some texts was self-conscious and clearly stated. For example, *Merely a Matter of Colour* (1973) – an anthology of Ugandan Asian prose and poetry – responded directly to the 1968 Immigration Act, which prohibited Asians expelled from East Africa from entering Britain. The collection was explicit in its efforts to ‘contest media stereotyping’,<sup>29</sup> diffuse popular misconceptions, and disprove unfavourable and exaggerated reports.<sup>30</sup> The unnamed author of the introduction to *Black and Priceless: The Power of Black Ink* (1988) also demanded a particular perspective of its readers: to “read” the thoughts between the lines and see the ways in which racism affects our lives’.<sup>31</sup> Other anthologies educated indirectly, inducting readers into unfamiliar worlds by glossing non-English terms and non-canonical cultural references.

The audience imagined by anthologists was not always antagonistic: some editors address their collections to ancestors or global contemporaries. In the foreword to *Times Like These* (1988) Edward Kamau Brathwaite positions the contributors as writing back to peers still resident in the Caribbean, attempting to maintain an aesthetic connection across the diaspora.<sup>32</sup> Anthologies mediate between cultures, symbolically compressing the distance travelled by migrants themselves.

Other anthologies address peers closer to home. Editor Zhana presents *Sojourn* (1988) as a tool to educate fellow black women, cautioning that ‘she who does not learn from others’ experience will be condemned to repeat it’.<sup>33</sup> One contributor to *Black and Priceless* (1988), Nayaba Aghebo, similarly sought ‘to strike a chord of unity with the [...] Black readers of this book’.<sup>34</sup> Introducing *Motherlands: Black Women’s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (1991), Susheila Nasta advises that ‘women writers living in Britain need to mother each other into a solid literary community’.<sup>35</sup> Some such texts supply their readers with specific tools to facilitate this work: *Sojourn* ends with a list of community groups, while *Motherlands* points towards other published sources of comfort and insight, listing recent anthologies that ‘focus on the collective elements of women’s experience’.<sup>36</sup> Other texts hoped their readers would go on to



participate in the act of writing. The introduction to *Flaming Spirit* (1994) celebrates the growth and diversification of membership precipitated by the previous publication of the Asian Women Writers' Collective.<sup>37</sup> Editor Kadija George presents the contributors to *Six Plays by Black and Asian Women Writers* (1993) as 'models' for 'Young Black women [...] to look towards', considering the book part of a wider outreach effort to schools by writers and performers.<sup>38</sup> Some writings by children and young adults were incorporated into other anthologies: *Black and Priceless* (1988) included four young writers aged from 14.<sup>39</sup>

Many anthologies inscribe educating the next generation as an explicit motivation. Representatives from Centreprise – a publisher, community centre and specialist bookshop in Hackney – commend *Breaking the Silence* (1984) for its potential use in schools to prompt dialogue between pupils of Asian and non-Asian backgrounds, as well as in Asian families to facilitate understanding between the generations.<sup>40</sup> A few collections were compiled specifically for young people; editor Grace Nichols describes *Black Poetry* (1988) as an effort to correct the 'omission and neglect [of black writers] by the literary establishment'.<sup>41</sup> Such activity follows in the tradition of Kenneth Ramchand and Cecil Gray's *West Indian Poetry: An Anthology for Schools* (1971, 1989), which not only brings the selected poems to the attention of teachers and their pupils but also attempts to educate that audience in how to read: the editors offer commentary and questions for each set of poems, and advise 'repeated oral readings' in the classroom.<sup>42</sup>

By the 1980s, cognisance of gender politics had fractured the provisional unity of the umbrella term 'Black' and subject matter was increasing in specificity. Several anthologies and periodicals dedicated to women emerged, often in association with particular organisations: Brixton Black Women's Group (1973-1985) produced the newsletter *Speak Out*; OWAAD produced *FOWAAD!*; Black Womantalk (1983-1991) published *Black Women Talk Poetry* (1987) and *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women* (1991). Female writers and editors rapidly became a numeric majority. It is clear that women performed much of the work to establish a black British identity that is now readily recognised in the official language of censuses, even if not yet reflected in equal access to the privileges of citizenship.

The differentiation of gay and lesbian voices brought further diversification. These increasingly specific political agendas not only exposed the fragility of an inclusive 'Black' identity but also motivated acts of solidarity with other intersecting groups from beyond the black and Asian communities. For example, Jackie Kay's writing found a comfortable home in anthologies like *Stepping Out: Short Stories on Friendships Between Women* (1986) and *Beautiful Barbarians: Lesbian Feminist Poetry* (1987), and her play *Chiaroscuro* was given a rehearsed reading by Gay Sweatshop in 1985 before being produced by Theatre of Black Women in 1986.

Post-millennial anthologies demonstrate a definite – perhaps even defiant – distance from

the earlier motivation of explicit anti-racist education. Kwame Dawes' *Red* (2010) playfully announces itself as 'a different kind of anthology'.<sup>43</sup> Its constitutive poems are united not by the self-reflexive subject of blackness in Britain but instead variously interpret the title colour: as symbolic of passion, anger, blood and violence; as a prompt for particular images; and as allusion to a Caribbean term for a particular shade of skin and presumed lineage.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, submissions to *Closure* (2015) responded to the title of the proposed anthology rather than centring on their authors' identities.<sup>45</sup>

## Writing as warfare

For many members of collectives and contributors to anthologies, writing was an act of social survival: it enabled their experiences to be heard. Zhana explicitly invited biographical readings of her 1988 edited collection: '*Sojourn* is a record of some of the many-sided experiences of some Black women in Britain'.<sup>46</sup> As Kobena Mercer recognised, it was important that many such stories were collated: 'Collaborative writing was a strategic means of interruption, or *breaking the silence* as we used to say, in which the act of publication makes public experiences that have been lived as privatised, individualised and pathologised *problems*'.<sup>47</sup> The phrase 'breaking the silence' circulated repeatedly, becoming a call to arms – or to anthologise: it named a book published by Centreprise in 1984, collecting anonymised writings detailing the personal experiences of Asian women living in Britain, and also titled a section in Susheila Nasta's edited collection of critical essays, *Motherlands*.<sup>48</sup>

Editors also broke the formal convention of 'criticizing in silence' advocated of anthologies by Arthur Quiller-Couch.<sup>49</sup> The objective presentation of uncontextualised texts is arguably appropriate only for writers whose status *as* writers is uncontested. In the 1980s, with black and Asian people still battling in many ways simply to be recognised as British, many editors took the opportunity to assert their contributors' authorial status explicitly. Rukhsana Ahmad and Rahila Gupta describe *Flaming Spirit* as part of 'an ongoing process of recognition of Asian women writers'.<sup>50</sup> Pratibha Parmar and Sona Osman commend the four contributors to *A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets* (1984) for their 'courage' in identifying themselves as poets.<sup>51</sup> The collective Black Womantalk similarly acknowledged the 'courageous act' of black women submitting their writing to a publisher,<sup>52</sup> while the editors of *Breaking the Silence* thank contributors for their 'bravery'.<sup>53</sup> Framing commentaries by established authors further validate the contributors as part of a literary coterie. *Black and Priceless* begins with a preface by Benjamin Zephaniah, who had by then published two poetry collections and was celebrated on the

performance circuit. Audre Lorde endorsed *A Dangerous Knowing*, writing that the poems ‘give me something I need, an affirmation of myself as a black woman, feminist, poet’.<sup>54</sup> In Deirdre Osborne’s collections of plays, *Hidden Gems* (2008; 2012), each playtext is preceded by a critical essay or interview, establishing the writers as part of a scholarly community.<sup>55</sup> Just as arts collectives and anthologies participated in the naming and evolution of shared identities, the act of publication ascribed to the contributors the status of ‘author’.

The anthology form usefully provides ‘a window for new writers’ – to borrow a phrase from Kadija Sesay’s introduction to *Burning Words, Flaming Images* (1996).<sup>56</sup> Note, though, that the meaning of the term ‘new’ has been curiously fluid; Evaristo frames *Ten* as a collection that ‘showcases [the writers’] promise and talent’, despite the fact that these eponymous ‘new poets’ had all been published previously in magazines or pamphlets.<sup>57</sup> Anthologies published in the 1980s frequently included work by people who had no previous publishing record. They often included personal biographies (remarking on place of birth, education, and family life) and were sometimes illustrated with portrait photographs. This paratextual material gave a vivid snapshot of contemporary cultural activism but it also acts as a chronological freeze-frame, producing a rather unfortunate sense of black British and British Asian writing as belonging to a perpetual present – as if it is *always* ‘new’. As James Procter notes, there has been ‘a pervasive “forgetfulness” within the field’.<sup>58</sup> Few of those anthologised writers went on to publish individually, leaving the impression of a mass of authors suddenly disappearing. It should be noted, though, that many had been included as a result of special circumstances – such as participation in short courses or competitions – rather than out of a sustained commitment to professional writing. For example, a number of the contributions to *Black and Priceless* originated as entries to a creative writing competition organised by Cultureword in 1986. Historians of black and Asian writing would therefore do well to recall that the process of enabling people to publicly come to voice was as significant as the resulting publications.

Rather than publishing work by new writers some anthologies sought to inscribe an historical tradition. Of those collecting previously published pieces, Lynette Goddard’s *The Methuen Drama Book of Plays by Black British Writers* (2011) is exemplary; it brings together six plays first produced between 1979 and 2007, selected from the several generations of black British playwrights.<sup>59</sup> In other cases editors articulated a literary lineage in their introductions. Yvonne Brewster’s first (1987) collection of black British plays catalogues recent performances by black actors and productions of works by black playwrights while her second (1989) collection constructs a record dating back to 1907, listing a series of touchstones with the urgency of establishing a new canon.<sup>60</sup> Debjani Chatterjee’s introduction to *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry* (2000) looks further back, offering 1794 as the primary moment for British South Asian literature

with reference to Sake Dean Mahomed.<sup>61</sup> James Berry's *News for Babylon* (1984) provides a brief history of plantation culture to explain the contemporary use of Creole, before tracing some key literary figures and forms from the eighteenth-century Jamaican Francis Williams to the dialect verse of Louise Bennett. Editors recognised their anthologies as constituting literary history, too; Berry's *Bluefoot Traveller* (1976) was revised and reissued in 1981 'to rectify previous omissions' correcting the lack of female contributors and writers born in Britain.<sup>62</sup>

What unites anthologies across the decades is the editors' insistence on the diversity of the contributors and their texts. Bhikhu Parekh affirms that his 1974 study 'show[s] that immigrants do not constitute a solid and cohesive group thinking and feeling alike on the issues affecting their life'.<sup>63</sup> Zephaniah celebrates the works collected in *Black and Priceless* (1988) as representing the 'many shades of Black'.<sup>64</sup> Evaristo writes that the poems selected for *Ten* 'cannot be reduced to [...] a homogeneous "black voice" or "Asian voice"'.<sup>65</sup> And Ross characterises *Closure* by its 'diversity of subject matter, and the varying stances of the writers'.<sup>66</sup> Grace Nichols expresses this sentiment with poetic vision:

I can write  
no poem big enough  
to hold the essence  
of a black woman  
[...]  
and there are black women  
and black women  
like a contrasting sky  
of rainbow spectrum.<sup>67</sup>

Nichols' threefold repetition of 'black women' demonstrates that despite a superficial sameness, meaning is dependent on context and is never identical from one line – or one person – to the next. This is analogous to the work of the anthology, and its associated collective: though gathered under one title, naming the contributors and members with an ostensibly fixed identity, what is contained within is multitudes.

Black British and British Asian anthologies have resisted the 'burden of representation', to use Kobena Mercer's term: the expectation that a single work by a minority figure can be read as representative of a whole community.<sup>68</sup> The anthology format is by definition 'a *mixtum composition*' – as Korte writes – 'whose assembled parts [...] have been woven together to form a new textual whole'.<sup>69</sup> Capable of containing diverse works, it gathers together that which is

ostensibly alike precisely in order to reveal the ‘profane differences’ within.<sup>70</sup> The heterogeneity of the materials in any one anthology insists on the provisionality of the terms that title it, refusing any essentialist explanation. These fascinating texts can therefore be understood as actively articulating a Britain that is richer for its diversity and wiser for its complexity.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> James Procter (ed.), *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 6.
- <sup>2</sup> Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 19, 39; see also Chapter 6 of this volume.
- <sup>3</sup> Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race* (London: Virago, 1985), 208-209.
- <sup>4</sup> Kwesi Owusu, *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain: What Can We Consider Better Than Freedom* (London: Comedia, 1986), 58.
- <sup>5</sup> See Chapter 17 of this volume where Gail Low details the appeal of post-war London for writers and artists seeking metropolitan as well as local audiences.
- <sup>6</sup> Rukhsana Ahmad and Rahila Gupta (eds.), *Flaming Spirit: Stories from the Asian Women Writers’ Collective* (London: Virago, 1994), xiii.
- <sup>7</sup> Bryan, *The Heart of the Race*, 170.
- <sup>8</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography’ in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988), 197-221, 205.
- <sup>9</sup> Rhonda Cobham, ‘Introduction’ in Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins (eds.), *Watchers & Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain* (London: The Women’s Press, 1987), 3-11, 9.
- <sup>10</sup> Fred D’Aguiar, ‘Black British Poetry’ in Gillian Allnutt (ed.), *The New British Poetry 1968-1988* (London: Paladin, 1988), 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Cobham and Collins (eds.), *Watchers & Seekers*, 154.
- <sup>12</sup> Paul Anthony, ‘The History Maker’ in Obatala Press (ed.) *Times Like These* (London: Black Rose, 1988), 40.
- <sup>13</sup> Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers*, 60.
- <sup>14</sup> Jacob Ross (ed.), *Closure: Contemporary Black British Short Stories* (Leeds: Inscribe, 2015), 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Barbara Korte, ‘Flowers for the Picking: Anthologies of Poetry in (British) Literary and Cultural Studies’ in Barbara Korte, Ralf Schneider and Stefanie Lethbridge (eds.) *Anthologies of British Poetry: Critical Perspectives from Literary and Cultural Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 1-32, 7.
- <sup>16</sup> Korte, ‘Flowers’, 11
- <sup>17</sup> Da Choong, Olivette Cole-Wilson, Bernardine Evaristo, and Gabriela Pearse (eds.), *Black Women Talk Poetry* (London: Black Womantalk, 1987), 7.
- <sup>18</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘What is Minor Poetry?’, *The Sewanee Review* 54.1 (1946), 1-18, 2.
- <sup>19</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘New Ethnicities’ in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 441-449, 442. Emphasis original.
- <sup>20</sup> Zhana, ‘Introduction’ in Zhana (ed.), *Sojourn* (London: Methuen, 1988), 11-33, 19.
- <sup>21</sup> Bernardine Evaristo, ‘Introduction’ in Evaristo (ed.), *Ten: New Poets* (London: Bloodaxe, 2010), 11-16, 13.
- <sup>22</sup> James Berry (ed.), *News for Babylon: The Chatto Book of Westindian-British Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984), 211.

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- <sup>23</sup> Kwesi Owusu, *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain: What can we Consider Better than Freedom* (London: Comedia, 1986), n.p.; Kwesi Owusu (ed.), *Storms of the Heart: An Anthology of Black Arts & Culture* (London: Camden Press, 1988), 303.
- <sup>24</sup> Owusu, 1988, 303.
- <sup>25</sup> Choong, *Black Women Talk*, 8.
- <sup>26</sup> Black Womantalk Collective, 'Introduction' in Da Choong, Olivette Cole Wilson, Sylvia Parker and Gabriela Pearse (eds.), *Don't Ask Me Why: An Anthology of Short Stories by Black Women* (London: Black Womantalk, 1991), v-vi, v.
- <sup>27</sup> Earl Lovelace, untitled, in Kadija Sesay (ed.), *Burning Words, Flaming Images: Poems and Short Stories by Writers of African Descent* (London: SAKS, 1996), n.p.
- <sup>28</sup> D'Aguiar, 'Black British Poetry', 4.
- <sup>29</sup> Deirdre Osborne (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), xv.
- <sup>30</sup> Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers*, 52.
- <sup>31</sup> Anonymus, 'Introduction' in Rushiraj Munshi, Valerie Bloom, Fiona Walker and Fitz Lewis (eds.), *Black and Priceless: The Power of Black Ink* (Manchester: Crocus, 1988), xii-xiii, xii.
- <sup>32</sup> Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'Foreword' in Obatala Press (ed.) *Times Like These*, 7.
- <sup>33</sup> Zhana, *Sojourn*, 32.
- <sup>34</sup> Nayaba Aghebo, 'Biography' in Munshi (ed.) *Black and Priceless*, 91.
- <sup>35</sup> Nasta, *Motherlands*, xxviii.
- <sup>36</sup> Nasta, *Motherlands*, xxviii-xxix.
- <sup>37</sup> Ahmad, *Flaming Spirit*, xi.
- <sup>38</sup> Kadija George, 'Introduction' in George (ed.), *Six Plays*, 5-7, 5.
- <sup>39</sup> See Chapter 33 by Susanne Reichl on black and Asian British children's literature.
- <sup>40</sup> Centreprise, 'Preface', in Manjula Mukherjee (ed.), *Breaking the Silence: Writing by Asian Women* (London: Centreprise, 1984), n.p.
- <sup>41</sup> Grace Nichols, *Black Poetry* (London: Blackie, 1988), 7.
- <sup>42</sup> Kenneth Ramchand and Cecil Gray 'Foreword', in Ramchand and Gray (eds.), *West Indian Poetry: An Anthology for Schools* (Harlow: Longman, 1971), n.p.
- <sup>43</sup> Kwame Dawes, *Red: Contemporary Black British Poetry* (Leeds, Peepal Tree: 2010).
- <sup>44</sup> For a discussion of this anthology see Chapter 31 of the present volume by Denise deCaires Narain.
- <sup>45</sup> Ross, *Closure*, 12.
- <sup>46</sup> Zhana, *Sojourn*, 33.
- <sup>47</sup> Kobena Mercer, 'Back to My Routes: A Postscript to the 1980s' in James Procter (ed.), *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 285-293, 288.
- <sup>48</sup> Susheila Nasta (ed.), *Motherlands* (London: The Women's Press, 1991), 1.
- <sup>49</sup> Arthur Quiller-Couch, 'Preface' in Arthur Quiller-Couch (ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), vii-xi, viii.
- <sup>50</sup> Ahmad, *Flaming Spirit*, vii.
- <sup>51</sup> Pratibha Parmar and Sona Osman, 'Introduction' in Barbara Burford, Gabriela Pearse, Grace Nichols and Jackie Kay, *A Dangerous Knowing: Four Black Women Poets* (London: Sheba, 1984), vii-ix, vii.
- <sup>52</sup> Black Womantalk, *Don't Ask Me Why*, v.
- <sup>53</sup> Mukherjee, *Breaking the Silence*, n.p.
- <sup>54</sup> Audre Lorde, in Burford et al *A Dangerous Knowing*, outside rear cover.
- <sup>55</sup> Deirdre Osborne, 'Introduction' in Deirdre Osborne (ed.), *Hidden Gems: Contemporary Black British Plays* (London: Oberon, 2008), 7-16, 12.
- <sup>56</sup> Kadija Sesay, 'Introduction' in Sesay (ed.), *Burning Words*, n.p.
- <sup>57</sup> Evaristo, *Ten*, 15.

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- <sup>58</sup> James Procter, 'General Introduction' in Procter (ed.), *Writing Black Britain*, 1-12, 8-9.
- <sup>59</sup> Lynette Goddard, 'Introduction' in Lynette Goddard (ed.), *The Methuen Book of Plays by Black British Writers* (London: Methuen, 2011), vii-xxvi, xxv.
- <sup>60</sup> Yvonne Brewster, 'Introduction' in Yvonne Brewster (ed.), *Black Plays: Two* (London: Methuen, 1989), vii-viv.
- <sup>61</sup> Debjani Chatterjee, 'Foreword' in Debjani Chatterjee (ed.) *The Redbeck Anthology of British South Asian Poetry* (Bradford: Redbeck, 2000), 11-12, 11. See also Chapter 31 in this volume, by Denise deCaires Narain.
- <sup>62</sup> James Berry (ed.), *Bluefoot Traveller* (London: Harrap, 1981), 6.
- <sup>63</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, 'Introduction' in Bhikhu Parekh (ed.), *Colour, Culture and Consciousness: Immigrant Intellectuals in Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), 11-12, 11.
- <sup>64</sup> Zephaniah, 'Preface' in Munshi (ed.) *Black and Priceless*, ix.
- <sup>65</sup> Evaristo, *Ten*, 15.
- <sup>66</sup> Ross, *Closure*, 10.
- <sup>67</sup> Grace Nichols, 'Of course when they ask for poems about the "Realities" of black women' in Burford et al *A Dangerous Knowing*, 48.
- <sup>68</sup> Kobena Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', *Third Text* 4.10 (1990), 61-78.
- <sup>69</sup> Korte, 'Flowers', 18.
- <sup>70</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), 1.