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Book Review

Understanding 'Sufferation' by thinking about 'Differential (Im)mobilities'

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Deporting Black Britons: Portraits of Deportation to Jamaica' (2020) Edited by Luke de Noronha
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'Fe we time, fe we time
Dis a sufferer's time
Fe we time, children, fe we time
Dis a sufferer's time'

'Sufferer's Time' – Released by The Heptones (1976) Lyrics by Lee 'Scratch' Perry.

On August 11th 2021, Labour MP Diane Abbott the former UK Shadow Home Secretary (and first Black woman to be elected to parliament in 1987) in a media interview denounced the British government's sanctioning of yet another deportation flight to Jamaica on that very day (2021, August 11) 11th August, 2021) as a "shambles." Noting the impact of last minute legal interventions by immigration lawyers, migrant's rights campaigners and anti-deportation advocates, the Labour MP stated: "Well, what we know is originally there were meant to be 90 people on the flight, and it cost £300,000 altogether. But in the end [...] only seven people flew off and that cost us as a country, £43,000 per person. So the first thing we know about it is it's a shambles."

As the daughter of Jamaican migrants who came to the UK in the 1950's (Bunce and Linton, 2020) as part of the 'Windrush Generation' of Caribbean migrants invited from the British Commonwealth's colonial periphery to the Imperial 'Mother Country' to help rebuild post-war Britain (James and Harris edited, 1993; Hammond Perry, 2015), Diane Abbott was an informed and particularly well placed politician to challenge the governments ongoing policy of deportation flights. Thus Diane Abbott, in the media interview stated:

> The second thing we know about it is it's problematic targeting Jamaicans in this way. A Freedom of Information request showed that Jamaicans are disproportionately targeted for deportation. We also know that this is the fourth such flight since Windrush when so many who actually were legally here got deported. We have to look again at these deportation flights. They're becoming a shambles and brutal and unfair. ('It's a shambles: Diane Abbott criticises UK deportation flight to Jamaica', 2021, August 11), by Sam Sholli).

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However, for British Home Secretary Priti Patel, a child of Indian-Ugandan parents who fled Idi Amin's Uganda as refugees to settle in the UK in the 1970's, the deportation flight to Jamaica was neither a 'shambles' or 'unfair'. And confident that this particular immigration policy was approved of by the majority of the British public, who accept the rhetoric that there is no place in British society for 'foreign criminals' who have 'abused' British hospitality, Patel in response to anti-deportation critics like Diane Abbott, stated:

> These individuals are responsible for some of the most appalling crimes – rape, assault [...] drug offences and sexual assault of children. They have violated our laws and values [...] The British people should be in no doubt of my determination to remove these criminals to protect both the victims of their crimes and the public. The government uses every means to continue to remove foreign nationals who have committed crimes against our citizens. We remove foreign criminals from the UK to different countries every week and this flight is no different. ('It's a shambles: Diane Abbott criticises UK deportation flight to Jamaica, 2021, August 11), by Sam Sholi).

Evidence of the UK government seeking to enforce its 'hostile environment' rhetoric on removing 'foreign criminals' from the UK to different countries on a frequent basis was reported by the British media in April 2021 when the Home Office chartered its first ever flight to Vietnam. Migrant rights and anti-deportation campaigners highlighted that those being subject to removal to Vietnam may not have received proper access to legal advice, in part due to the conditions and restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Campaigners also argued that victims of trafficking may have been deported by the UK government, since Vietnam is one of the main countries for trafficking to the UK as tragically revealed in October 2019 when 39 Vietnamese migrants were found dead in a lorry in Essex. ('UK Home Office charters its first ever deportation flight to Vietnam', 2021, April 20), by Diane Taylor).

In this regard, author Luke de Noronha in his excellent book, 'Deporting Black Britons: Portraits of Deportation to Jamaica' (2020), notes how deporting states like the UK increasingly justify their policies by stating the need to respond to "clandestine mobilities, bogus asylum claims and intensified border crossing in general [...] the spectre of uncontrolled and unregulated mobility" (de Noronha, 2020, p. 6).

Linking the 'deportation turn' to the 'neoliberal revolution's (Hall, 2011) dismantling of the welfare state, de Noronha comments on the "emergence of new logics of expulsion" (de Noronha, 2020, p. 9) connected to notions of a 'deserving poor' (i.e. neglected white working class) and an 'undeserving poor' 'racialized outsider' (Virdee, 2014; Shilliam, 2018; Anderson, 2013). Thus, In the case of Jason, the first of his four portrait studies of

deportation to Jamaica, de Noronha explores how “immigration controls fundamentally structure individual and family stories” (de Noronha, 2020, p. 50). And in this regard, the focus of de Noronha’s deportation study “is not simply about the total exclusion of immigrants from British society, but also about how immigration controls produce inequalities and hierarchies within British society” (de Noronha, 2020, p. 50). Invoking Loic Wacquant’s concept of ‘neoliberal statecraft’ to help contrast the “difference that citizenship” makes for Jason’s homeless peers in contrast to his ‘illegal immigrant’ status, de Noronha observes:

> That does not mean that they had it easy, clearly they did not [...] ’undeserving’ British citizens are increasingly abandoned by the welfare arm of the state and punished by the coercive arm [...] However, what is true for homeless British citizens – that the state is simultaneously abandoning and punitive – is augmented for non-citizens who have no recourse to public funds (total abandonment) and who live under the constant threat of deportation. In this way ‘illegal immigrants’ like Jason encounter the neoliberal state at its most severe. (de Noronha, 2020, p. 53)

For de Noronha, incorporating a more critical analysis of how immigration controls and differential citizenship status combine to structure the “everyday realities in multi-status”, multi-ethnic Britain enables a richer understanding of the interplay between categories and hierarchies of race, class, and gender, alongside a more nuanced picture of how processes of racism and racialisation actually impact on lived experience: “...Jason’s experiences of racism were lived in relation to his homelessness, which was in turn produced by his illegalisation. This reminds us that immigration controls determine how racism gets into people’s lives.” (de Noronha, 2020, p. 60)

By providing a historically situated analysis of Jamaica’s colonial and post-colonial relationship to Britain, de Noronha delivers an insightful discussion of how the still unfolding ‘hostile environment‘- induced ‘Windrush Scandal’, which came into public prominence in 2018, intersects with the government’s deportation of Black Britons to Jamaica. This is in a context where, say the UK government’s critics, the British state and Home Office have neither implemented the key findings of the independent Wendy Williams ‘Windrush Lessons Learned Review’ (2018) nor paid the required compensation to those Black British citizens deemed eligible for compensation following their wrongful denial of citizenship rights and in some cases deportation by the British Home Office (See: Gentleman, 2020; El-Enany, 2020; Goodfellow, 2019). It was the then Home secretary Theresa May who in 2012, declared that a central plank of the government’s immigration policy was to “create here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants.” In this regard, de Noronha’s study resonates with research into forms of ‘Everyday Illegality’ such as Bloch et al’s (2014) investigation of the social and economic lives of young undocumented migrants, (Bloch et al, 2014) which foregrounds Schuster’s (2005) concept of ‘status mobility’,

thus Bloch et al, state: "Our research uses concepts of status mobility and fluidity of status to explore how the room for manoeuvre – in reality the limited room for manoeuvre – determines the lives and livelihoods of the young migrants." (Bloch et al, 2014, p. 26). It is then, in this sense that Luke de Noronha contextualises the UK's 'hostile environment' approach as part of a broader 'deportation turn' – "As noted it is only quite recently that deportation has become a routine component of immigration control in liberal democracies in the global North." (de Noronha, 2020, p. 11).

In her powerful analysis 'Us & Them: The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Controls' (2013), Bridget Anderson fuses the concept of 'the community of value' to an understanding that: "the history of the world is unavoidably a history of mobility. Thinking historically is a useful counter to political and academic claims of the exceptionalism of contemporary migration." (Anderson, 2013, p.12). Anderson's historically informed analysis of deportation therefore highlights how the vagrancy and labour laws of 14th century England and the subsequent Tudor period linked the mobility of the poor to labour control, with notions of vagrancy becoming associated with criminality (Anderson, 2013, p. 13).

It is in this broader historical frame that the expulsion and then belated re-inclusion by the British state and Home Office of the Windrush Scandal-affected Black British citizens within the UK's 'community of values' can be contrasted with those groups such as Black Britons deported to Jamaica, who due to their perceived moral failings and criminal behaviour are excluded from the 'community of value':

> As Bridget Anderson argues, the nation is defined as a 'community of value' not only through the exclusion of non-citizens (who do not belong because they are foreign), but also through the exclusion of failed citizens (who do not belong because they are criminal or idle). The undeservingness of migrants, then is intimately connected to the undeservingness of [...] 'criminals', who fail to demonstrate 'good citizenship'. All of these failed and excluded non-members can be contrasted with law abiding and hard- working taxpayers. (de Noronha, 2020, p. 53)

So how to account for the disproportionate targeting of 'Black Britons' for deportation to Jamaica, as noted earlier by Diane Abbott? A previous generation of young Black men were subject to the SUS Law, as documented in Jamaican-British poet Linton Kwesi Johnson's 'Anti SUS poem' the footnote of which informs: "SUS, short for 'suspicion': The Vagrancy Act, a revived piece of nineteenth century legislation that led to disproportionate arrests of black youth" (Johnson, 2006, p. 27). This earlier period of the second and third generation children of the Caribbean Windrush settlers' racialized experiences of institutionally racist British policing (Elliott-Cooper,

2021) overlays the current disproportionate numbers of young Black men subject to stop and search by the police (Lammy Review, 2017). It is against this backdrop of successive generational waves of racism and racialisation that de Noronha comments: "…racism makes some people more vulnerable to deportation than others, and the heavy disproportionate policing of young black men is central to the deportation of Jamaican nationals." (de Noronha, 2020, p.158)

Here then, we can note a report in the local Oxford Mail newspaper under the headline 'Home Office deports Oxford's Chevon Brown to Jamaica':

> Chevon Brown from Oxford was one of 29 convicts loaded onto a Home Office plane bound for Jamaica on Wednesday, having been told they had no right to remain in the UK. The 23 year old, who has lived all over Oxford since arriving in the UK aged 14, served eight months in prison after leading police on a high-speed chase […] His father Vance Brown […] said: Chevon's crimes were not serious, how can he be placed among rapists and murderers? […] He went to sign off when he was released (from prison) and then was detained. ('Home Office deports Oxford's Chevon Brown to Jamaica', Oxford Mail, 2019, February 09)

In discussing the 'post deportation' aspects of life in Jamaica for the four individual portraits of his ethnographic study, Luke de Noronha emphasises the continued unequal relationship between a nominally independent Jamaica and its former colonial ruler Britain. Jamaica's current dependence on remittances and tourism – "… remittances account for 16-17% of Jamaica's total GDP […] up to a third of the Jamaican population depend on regular remittances for their survival" (de Noronha, 2020, p.184) – are historically rooted in legacies of slavery and a colonial plantation economy which structurally condition the "global marginality and restricted mobility" (de Noronha, 2020, p.194) faced by the majority of Jamaica's citizens.

One of the most recent and shocking examples of Jamaica's 'global marginality' is presented by de Noronha via the concept of 'diffferential (im) mobilites, he states: "Across different periods, extractive industries have facilitated certain mobilities – whether of sugar, bananas, bauxite or tourists – in the context of the restricted mobility of (often unfree) labour"

And he continues: "In my view, thinking about differential (im)mobilities allows for a more sophisticated account of race and racism" – as – "racial distinctions and hierarchies are produced and reproduced through the ordering of movement" (de Noronha, 2020, p. 225)

It is then in relation to government 'ordering of mobility' that de Noronha reminds us of David Cameron's rejection of calls for reparations for 'Britain's Black debt' to Jamaica and the Caribbean for 'Caribbean slavery and Native Genocide' (Beckles, 2013) on his 2015 visit to the Island as British Prime Minster. The Imperial arrogance of Cameron and the British state and the neo-colonial dependency at the core of Jamaica's 'void sovereignty' (de Noronha, 2020, p.196) and 'Flag Independence' (Bedasse, 2017), is highlighted by de Noronha:

> ...David Cameron offered £25 million to build a modern prison in Jamaica, ultimately so that Jamaican nationals in UK prisons could be deported sooner (i.e. transferred). Jamaica would get a shiny new prison in return for complying with the UK's aggressive deportation policies [...] Again, the prison was to be funded through the UK's aid budget [...] The crucial point is that the production of mobility and immobility were intimately connected in Cameron's prison deal, just as they are within development policy more broadly. (de Noronha, 2020, pp. 229-230)

Crucially then, for this reader, it is the incorporation of the concept of 'Sufferation' as expressed within Jamaican-creole vernacular language, reggae music and popular discourse which adds an extra dimension to de Noronha's multi-layered analysis, he comments:

> Importantly, the concept of 'sufferation is central to how many Jamaicans understand the continuities between their present condition and histories of slavery and colonialism. The discourse of 'sufferation' implies a particular kind of historical imagination, in which colonialism and slavery come to dominate the imagineries of ordinary Jamaicans. (de Noronha, 2020, p. 188).

Ideas around 'Sufferation' are rooted in Jamaica's Rastafari movement as outlined by Horace Campbell, who makes reference to 'Rasta and the Revolt of the Sufferers in Jamaica 1938' as he describes the 'Origins of Rastafari' in his classic text 'Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney' (2007). Hence, the lyrics of the Heptones roots reggae song titled 'Sufferers Time', which was written by the late and legendary Jamaican reggae music producer Lee 'Scratch' Perry, carry the Rasta inspired lament 'Dis a sufferers time, Four hundred years of colonialism, and I and I no get high oy yeah..."

And so where Luke de Noronha, states: "The social, economic and cultural life of Jamaica is profoundly transnational [...] the Caribbean claims one of the most mobile working classes in the world" (De Noronha, 2020, p. 231), we can connect his analysis to Paul Gilroy's 'Black Atlantic Culture' and 'Moral Economies' framed exploration of mobility, where picking up on Campbell's discussion of 'Bob Marley and the internationalisation

of Reggae and Rasta' (Campbell, 2007), Gilroy relates how Bob Marley as an 'itinerant' member of Jamaica's poor working class spent some time as a "grumbling and disaffected worker" in the "U.S. automobile industry" (Gilroy, 2010,p.54). Acknowledging Bob Marley's unique contribution to the globalisation of cultural resistance oriented conceptions of 'sufferation', Gilroy states:

> Bob Marley, translocal star on the planetary stage, provided the twentieth century's last effective contribution to the forms of black consciousness that could span the divisions of colonial development and speak in different but complementary ways to dispersed and remote populations. His language, political and poetic, helped to synchronise their consciousness and their own divergent analyses of local experiences with a universal rhetoric of sufferation. (Gilroy, 2010, p. 53)

Luke de Noronha's compelling study, by drawing on the concept of 'Sufferation', provides revealing insights into how the agency of 'Black Britons' deported to Jamaica is structured by the 'ordering of mobility', in short, via interconnected and dynamic processes of 'bordering', racist policing and 'illegalisation ' of 'racialized outsiders'. And so, even as de Noronha gets us to acknowledge that the Caribbean has one of the most mobile working classes in the world, he simultaneously asserts: "The relevant point here is that if racial distinctions and hierarchies are always constituted by differential (im)mobilities, then contemporary modes of governing mobility offer a window onto historically specific configurations of race and racism." (de Noronha, 2020, p. 234)

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