



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

„The Development of Black British Poetry Across
Milestones“

verfasst von / submitted by

Katharina Reyhani

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. Phil.)

Wien, 2018 / Vienna, 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 190 344 445

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UF Englisch, UF Biologie und Umweltkunde

Betreut von / Supervisor:

ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Eva Zettelmann

Abstract

As the body of British poetry is expanding, new forms of poetic expression come to life. The struggle of British society with its own multicultural reality is exemplified in the representations of black British poetry in the canon, which is still a decisive element for the lyrical evolution of British poetry. Since black British poetry is rarely incorporated in the canon, this text will investigate how black British poetry developed as a category with regard to its origins in relation with colonialism and the role of the Canon for its rise to recognition, as well as observe current trends of overcoming old challenges. By analysing the growing body of knowledge in existing literature, the thesis will illustrate the increasing interest that surrounds black British poetry from academics and the public and display the poets' commitment to change the status quo.

Keywords: canon formation, black British poetry, post colonialism, representation

So wie sich die Gesamtheit der britischen Lyrik entfaltet, werden neue Formen des lyrischen Ausdrucks sichtbar. Das Ringen der Britischen Gesellschaft mit seiner eigenen multikulturellen Realität wird in den Repräsentationen von *black British poetry* im Kanon veranschaulicht, der immer noch ein bestimmendes Element für die lyrische Evolution Britischer Lyrik darstellt. Da *black British poetry* selten im Kanon aufgenommen wird, wird dieser Text untersuchen, wie sich *black British poetry* als Kategorie entwickelt hat, bezüglich seiner Ursprünge während des Kolonialismus und der Rolle des Kanons für den Anstieg von Anerkennung, sowie aktuelle Trends beobachten, alte Herausforderungen zu überwinden. Durch eine Analyse des wachsenden Wissensbestands in der bestehenden Literatur wird die Diplomarbeit das wachsende Interesse, das *black British poetry* von Akademikern und der Öffentlichkeit umgibt, veranschaulichen und die Hingabe der Dichter, den Status Quo zu verändern, darstellen.

Schlagworte: Kanonbildung, *black British poetry*, Postkolonialismus, Repräsentation

Table of Content

1. Introduction and aims	5
1.1 Background.....	5
1.2 Thesis topic/question and aim	5
1.3 Approach	6
1.4 Sources and methods	7
2. Black British poetry's origins – redefining 'British'	9
2.1 What does 'black British' mean?	10
2.2 Black settlement into British society	16
2.3 Origins of black British writing and later poetry (time and place)	18
2.3.1 Black British writing before 1948	18
2.3.2 After 1948.....	21
2.4 Post colonialism's role in black British poetry.....	21
2.4.1 Attempts of defining post colonialism	22
2.4.2 The connection between post colonial literature and black British literature	25
2.5 Summing up the role of colonialism in shaping the rise/origin of black British poetry	27
3. British Canon and black British poetry	28
3.1. Defining the canon	28
3.2. Forming a canon and its power	30
3.2.1 Agents behind canon formation.....	31
3.2.2 The Canon's influence and power	34
3.2.3 The impact of representation.....	39
3.2.4 Canon as a rigid construct – slowly opening up to inclusion	43
3.3 Represented black British poetry	44
3.3.1 Black British poets included in the Canon	44
3.4 Summary: influence of the Canon.....	56
4. Current trends in black British poetry and their influence.....	57
4.1 Overcoming challenges for true recognition.....	57
4.2 Influential current black British Poets	61
4.2.1 Warsan Shire	62
4.2.2 Yrsa Daley-Ward	63
4.2.3 Kayo Chingonyi	65
4.2.4 Caleb Femi	66
5. Conclusion	67
6. Bibliography.....	71

6.1 Printed Sources.....	71
6.2 Online Sources.....	72

1. Introduction and aims

1.1 Background

British poetry was always considered famous for its richness and linguistic style, presenting British life style and love for the country. From Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to Shakespeare's manifold and inspiring poetry to T.S. Eliot's contributions to the Canon, British poetry illustrates a vivid and multifaceted approach to lyrical writing. The classics are frequently discussed in schools all over the world and integrated in the English language classroom so that their works are always remembered. For any student of English poetry, these well-known writers are immediately listed and their authority within the British literature cannot be underestimated. Although their presence is always noticeable, recent years have seen a shift going through this genre with serious attempts to explore the diversity underlying this century old construct.

With the rise of organised groups to tackle inequality among gender, race and other issues, injustice across all society's levels was addressed globally. These types of movements gave voice to individuals previously not heard who suddenly found a public space for their cause and consequently gained support from a broader audience. Many minorities, especially black American and British citizens, finally found ways to stand up united and claim their rightful places in society. During these times artists played a vital role, because their works helped describe the unjust circumstances of lawful citizens. These social movements created new discourses which have since influenced scientific studies. In the case of literature, the impact has been essential to the rise in new literature categories. Various works explore the issues concerning black lives in literature, draw attention to this situation and propel the process of coming to terms with the past and reshaping the future. For British poetry, studies on black British poetry shed important light on features of British poetry which for historic reasons have been understudied or undervalued.

1.2 Thesis topic/question and aim

In this paper I focus on black British poetry and its rise in recognition among critics and audiences. The aim of this thesis is to explore the development of black British poetry; its origins, its rise to acceptance and current trends. The analytical lens which this paper adopts to explore this rather vast topic is focusing on characteristic features within each of the developmental milestones of black British poetry. To this end this paper asks the question: How has black British poetry developed looking at a.) its early history in relation to colonialism b.) the role of the British Canon in its rise to recognition and c.) current trends of overcoming challenges through innovation.

1.3 Approach

To achieve the outlined aim, after a reflection about the meanings of the terms “black” and “British”, I start by looking into the history of black British settlers. This illustrates the time-span during which the British Isles were home to a multicultural population and how this could impact the general perception of having the idea of being a mainly white nation. As cultural production is always essential for forming identity and feeling part of a community, one cannot be surprised about the wealth of literary works produced by non-white Brits contributing to the British body of literature before their status as British subjects became more recognised. The contributions of non-whites will be outlined and a few case studies/examples will be analysed to explore the eagerness of non-white British writers to share their writings with the public and how they overcame obstacles in early life to find due respect for their work.

Since post-colonialism is intimately connected to the discussion about the history of non-white British poetry and plays a vital role in the establishment of the category of “black British poetry”, its influence in categorizing and emphasizing this field of literature will be discussed. Within this section of the paper, the difficulty in finding appropriate labels for literature will be thematised as well. As past years have shown, associations with the term black were often politicised and negatively charged. Meanwhile, a shift can be noticed and especially young people feel more at ease to use this term, including using it to describe certain behaviour linked to street style.

Moving from the early history of black British poetry and the role of colonialism, the paper turns to the meaning of “the canon” and its formation – highlighting the consequences of being included or left out of this construct. Therefore, the paper discusses the power that is held by the canon and institutions or individuals, who contribute to its formation. Within these considerations it seems important to generally reflect on the power of discourse which accompanies canon formation as well as the canon’s power in forming identities. Another aspect which helps explore the overall aim of the thesis is a discussion on representation – including a theoretical approach to understanding its semantic meaning. The following section is concerned with introducing already canonised poets who are known for their great reputation. Having their works discussed and analysed in school lessons was thought to clearly signal their presence in society and their well-received reputation among the greater public. However, there seems to be a struggle to incorporate poets from non-Caribbean background, since the majority have their roots there. Black British poets have always had some kind of influence on further developing British culture and society. This circumstance will be the main focus in the last chapter of my thesis which explores the new wave of black British poetry. In this context,

common prejudices about blacks are explored and discussed how they motivate poets to challenge these misconceptions. To illustrate this point, several young non-white British poets from different backgrounds will be explored. Looking at poetry published in open-access or online media format demonstrates how essential new forms of publishing and representation for this generation of writers are. Without their drive and motivation to contribute to British culture, one could wonder whether poetry is dead. However, as the thesis explores, their ability to share lyrical texts in perfect English and to connect with young audiences worldwide and from all backgrounds, brings hope for the whole genre of poetry.

1.4 Sources and methods

The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010) was a valuable source to conduct my research. It provides a historic overview of the emergence of black lives in Great Britain after the Second World War and connects these experiences with the ones of today. By analysing the movements accomplished in the last thirty years, the Companion assists in offering a thorough introduction of the situation at hand. Without mourning about the unjust treatment black writers have faced over the centuries, the reflections accentuate the forward-thinking developments, that society and the literature scene is about to undergo. The contributors to this collection have their background in university research and publishing their own works in the area of minority writing, black British or post-colonial studies - including well-known authors like James Procter or Susheila Nasta. What makes this volume particularly relevant for this paper, is its reflection on recently established categories and modern techniques of presenting poetry to an ever-changing audience. Without focusing too much on already famous and canonised writers like Jackie Kay or Salman Rushdi, the authors give space for a broader outlook on British literature.

When researching for the chapter about establishing a black British canon, Gail Low's and Marion Wynne-Dawes' book *A Black British Canon?* proved to be very helpful. The contributors to this work range from Sandra Courtman over John McLeod to James Procter and have their professions in teaching writing and post-colonial literatures as well as experience in publishing for magazines like *Wasafiri*. This book constitutes a response to the rise of scholarly interest in black British culture after the 1980s and mainly discusses the manifold possibilities for establishing a black British canon and the implications for British culture. Therefore, the authors analyse how the term black British is used in literature, performance and theatre and how this meaning creates a new understanding in society by specifically focusing on the diverse contributions of black British artists. However, this focus is also regarded as a challenge, since a separation from other British artists could increase the gap between white and non-white Brits.

Such considerations illustrate the multiple meanings of black British in my thesis and to depict the difficulties of integration of minorities into a centuries-long developed discriminatory structure. Moreover, the book also sheds light on the issue of making conscious choices about integrating texts into the canon or leaving them out, considering the impact such decisions can have on artists and society's conception about cultural productions.

As my research was also concerned with getting to know more about already well-known writers and exploring new ones, the internet sources proved to be very valuable. Some black British poets like Patience Agbabi, Kwame Dawes or Fred d'Aguiar are frequently mentioned in canonical works and are continually represented in scientific collections or magazines. To find out more about the ones, who are also part of the canon, but find not the way into the public perception so easily, already introduced books were helpful for the beginning. However, they failed to present a broader picture about the writers, wherefore the internet provided the missing information. Since black British poetry is just unfolding and receiving more and more recognition, the contributions of young writers are rarely subject of recent analyses. Nevertheless, being present on social media platforms and finding audiences in public performances and readings, the new generation of poets actively works on their representation and receive due recognition with awards or newspaper articles. These sources of information become important for creating an understanding of their impact on the development of British culture. The frequency of being mentioned online signalled for me the influence these writers can have on the public perception due to the heightened presence. Being interviewed by newspapers such as *The Guardian* or *The New Yorker* and being referred to by different bloggers again were indications that these poets were representative for the new wave.

During my research I noticed a sense of uprising and enthusiasm among writers and poets due to the revived interest in non-white poetry. Not only poets strive for recognition and better working conditions, but also the number of critics and researchers is growing to be able to conduct proper analyses. As the nation's population continually strives to integrate the manifold peoples living on its islands, social structures are being tested and renewed. The increasing numbers of newcomers and new generations with migrant backgrounds contribute to a new shape of the nation. The need to mingle and form a new understanding of how Britishness should look like is especially felt by the younger generation who actively try to change the general perception. Artists and poets appear to play a great role within this matter by making their audiences aware of challenges and adding in to forming strong identities.

However, it became clear that this process of reshaping a nation's perception depends on multiple factors, wherein literature might play only one small part. Although there might be

many poets producing inventive and revolutionary texts, they can be easily suppressed by social structures, which do not permit diversity. Therefore, the processes of canon formation encouraged me to reflect on some aspects which promote a culture's development. Researching into this area, however, showed me how extensive this undertaking can be and so the need to decide on a few aspects became quickly apparent. For this reason, I concentrated my efforts in mapping out some underlying concepts (agency, influence through power and representation), so that the reader would get some introduction which could assist in conducting deeper and more specialised research.

Being concerned with the development of black British poetry in Great Britain, the thesis strives to illustrate key issues closely linked to its progress, it does not however attempt or claim to present a complete picture of its development. As many lines of research besides literature feed into this topic – historical, political, social to name a few – it was difficult to maintain the focus and give detailed account of the situation at hand. The approach with three milestones and for each milestone a formative feature explored was therefore taken.

2. Black British poetry's origins – redefining 'British'

Black British poetry is a category within the British literary canon which in recent times has attracted more and more attention due to the complexity of its definition and range of radical changes in form and use of language. It's a category that strives to integrate different voices and art forms, bringing together different experiences from various cultures and life situations.

Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe already now reflect on it as a defining element for British poetry. After T.S. Eliot, "the last great innovator in British poetry this century" (85), they suspect "that when the history of twentieth century British poetry comes to be written up, the black poets will be recognised for greatly enriching poetic expression through their experiments with orality and music" (ibid.). Especially, since

black British poetry mediates between two ways of thinking about language and voice. On the one hand, the poem as a craft for voice conceived of as immediate and authentic; whether thought of as "embody[ing] the poet's identity", or as the vehicle of "collective consciousness" and longer submerged histories. On the other, voice as itself the work of craft, both mediated by and in productive tension with other languages, other voices, as well as the material reality of text itself. (Gilmour 346)

In order to understand the development of the category, its early origins are important. This section introduces and outlines defining historical phases of Black British Poetry, analysing the influence and context of colonialism in its formation.

This chapter begins with a discussion on what the somewhat controversial terms black and British mean- from a literary discourse perspective as well as in this essay. It then explores the origins of black British poetry, which begins with the movement of black people to the British Isles. The thesis then moves to analyse the origins of black British writing and – in line with the research question – concludes with an analysis on post colonialism and its connection to black British poetry. As acts of settling into the British society are closely intertwined with colonialism and its following developments, the theme of colonialism runs throughout this chapter.

2.1 What does ‘black British’ mean?

Defining black British literature is certainly no easy task due to the complex layers surrounding the term ‘black’ which in turn pervades the concept of ‘British’. Lima claims that these two terms have again developed new meanings and “realigned themselves in yet another configuration” (47). Terminology is originally concerned with providing labels which are easy to grasp and use in any kind of speech or text production. However, it often entails the manifestation or establishment of prejudices that categorising processes usually are prone to. When discussing the term ‘black British’ Osborne notices that it has been in constant change and development, resonating with society and current politics without sticking to rules of governing aesthetics (see 7). In the late 1960s the term ‘black British’ was used more widely to describe the Caribbean Artists Movement and included people from African as well as Caribbean decent (see Reichl 34). Similarly, ‘black literature’ has its foundation in the Black Arts Movement in the United States and according to Arana, however, became twisted to indicate racism and a new movement of resistance (38). Another stance, which Reichl points out is that the term ‘black British’ is still linked not only to a specific field of literature, but also to cultural studies (see 33). As black British writers often dealt with issues of identity, they were not only regarded as artists, but also as agents who contribute to forming and influencing a culture and were therefore subject to cultural studies (ibid.).

These manifold conceptions about ‘black British’ makes it obvious that Black British studies is a highly diverse field for studies which seems to struggle to find a common understanding regarding methodology and theory when research is carried out (ibid.). Another challenge with defining ‘black British’ is its political past, where it was used to build up an alternative to the existing cultural identity (see Lima 48) and “encompassed African, South Asian, and Caribbean U.K.-passport-carrying citizens, as well as political exiles from other parts of the world, including South America” (Lima 49).

Around the mid-1980s “[t]he signifier *Black* [...] was synonymous with political activism and change. Already, the word meant something different in the U.K. context: it was more an idea to be achieved through politics than either a race or a textual horizon” (ibid.). While the British nationality was earlier also conferred to citizens from the colonies, it was completely remodelled after riots and tumults around Great Britain in spring and summer 1981. These rebellious acts around the country, which united black and white young people, signalled their resentment of raising injustice and violence against the British non-white population (see Arana 23). However, their efforts were met by Thatcher’s proposal of a “narrower, reactionary redefinition of British citizenship – and of residents’ civil rights” (ibid.). From this, the British Nationality Act of 1981 was established and stated: “Only those whose parents had been born in the United Kingdom, or had been legally ‘settled’ there, would henceforth qualify for the newly created ‘British citizenship’” (ibid.). During these tumults Tories and Labour turned against each other during the election campaign in 1983, being black and British became an impossible status (ibid.). The open deconstruction of black and British fuelled the discussion about dichotomous thinking and equalising concepts of nation and culture to values (see Lima 50). At the same time, coloured people who experienced racism and marginalisation from their fellow Britons found in the term “the organising category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions, and ethnic identities” as Hall is quoted in Baker, Diawara and Lindeborg. He goes on explaining that

[i]n this moment, politically speaking, ‘The Black Experience,’ as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became ‘hegemonic’ over other ethnic/racial identities – though the latter did not, of course, disappear. Culturally, this analysis formulated itself in terms of a critique of the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible ‘other’ of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses. (ibid.)

Reichl translates Halls’ notions by describing his understanding of ‘blackness’ more as a matter of “finding an empowering position for the formerly disempowered” and that “although there is a recognition of a strategically constructed unity, this does not level out the diversity of cultural production” (34f). How culturally diverse the group of black British writers actually is, it is helpful to look at a widely-used definition of it. Walters depicts it as

literature written by people of African descent who were both born and reared in England, literature written and published by expatriate writers from Africa and the Caribbean who published on both sides of the Atlantic [...], literature written by people who are simply dark in colour, such as East Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and other Asians, Near Easterners, and North Africans. (172)

It seems clear then, naming a literary category supposed to cover people from these various backgrounds, after their skin colour is not the best approach. An interesting anthology with focus on literature by non-white British writers uses the police code IC3 to refer to a group comprising Africans, Asians, West Indians, Americans and sometimes Chinese (see Newland x). One of the editors, Courttia Newland, states in the introduction “that most Black people didn’t know it existed” and that this encouraged her “to have it out in the open” (ibid.).

After years of treating these highly diverse cultural backgrounds more or less as one, voices increasingly called for a clearer distinction of the non-white population. This would enable authors (and also artists from film and music) to being recognised more for genre specific details. This being said, Reichl observed that the texts she was looking at during her research, showed “similar textual strategies, means of transcultural negotiations and the meeting of various sign systems, despite obvious differences, historical and socio-political specificities” (38). This circumstance might be indicative for processes of integration into a new system, where individual character traits and cultural background become secondary, whereas the communication with the people around oneself is more vital. In the case of settling into the British society Reichl argues that “it was not only people who moved, but languages and cultures, not only human beings who opened up and communicated with others, but also, by implication, linguistic and cultural sign systems that entered into mutual exchange with redefinition of one another” (39).

The discussion thus far demonstrates that the term “black” is fluid, has been used differently and cannot be pinned down to a specific degree of colour or origin. However, for it to have meaning it cannot be stretched to all non-white contributors. For the purposes of this essay then, black British poets will not primarily refer to Asian or South-American poets and related history. The historical development and case examples studies will cover what the literature mainly refers to by black British poetry – i.e. the literary movement rising from settlements from British colonies and post colonial migration (e.g. from Jamaica, Nigeria, Somalia).

Moving beyond the discussion of the term ‘black’ – ‘Britishness’ as it is used in black British poetry also does not come without controversy. As it is experienced problematic for black British artists to be grouped together by their tone of skin, many also (unfairly) have to prove themselves in being enough ‘British’ and therefore, to be included to the black British category of literature. Osborne observes that

[o]ne’s indigenouness is recognised through birth or naturalisation (and a British passport), yet the visual marker of appearance can undermine this, producing an outsider

and marginalised status – where certain citizens need to keep proving they are British even if they were born in Britain. (7)

John McLoed refers to D'Aguiar who “argued that the phrase [black British] perpetuated the division of blacks from Britons, each conceived of as a racially-different homogeneous group” (56). Moreover, he identifies the “alliance of the terms ‘black’ and ‘British’” as “unhappy and unhelpful” for categorising the literary production of black writers throughout the last 90 years in Great Britain (ibid). It might be useful here to remember the history of the recent definition of being a British citizen. As Lima points out,

[t]he basic understanding was that all who came under the Crown's power were British subjects. The British Nationality and Aliens Act (1914), for example, sought to define British citizenship for an empire that was, obviously, scattered, multiracial and multinational. (51)

It is a difficult undertaking attempting to bring nations together under one regime and managing affairs in far-away countries while attempting to integrate their citizens. Many literary works have been devoted to the phenomenon of British officials sent to introduce and maintain a British way of life in far-off nations. The Act of 1914 was meant to regulate the legal background of obtaining the British nationality, which developed throughout centuries (Lima 51). Lima describes further that this parliamentary statute “defined those who were henceforth to be considered British citizens, the means whereby an alien could be naturalised, and also how she or he could lose the status of being British” (ibid.). Considering the very act of conferring citizenship explained in this way seems to be rather unstable and inexplicable. This process of entitlement offers itself a number of aspects, one has to be aware of when discussing citizenship or nationality. On the one hand for example, it only functions on the level of human conceptualisations and therefore, needs to be regarded as something that underlies constant change and is determined by the requirements of a specific time. On the other hand, the power of an authority to decide over another human being's life and possibilities holds another range of challenges, which find their voices not only in political debates. In the case of citizenship, it also involves topics of conferring rights and duties to individuals who sometimes require appropriate education before they can fully make use of their place in society. However, it seems not the place to discuss these issues in this paper, despite their relevance at any time. Touching upon them above only briefly, seemed nonetheless important to stress their far-reaching influence. It should also assist achieving a better understanding of the current discourses on Britishness and with regard to the paper's topic, help to assess the challenges faced by non-white British writers.

To continue reviewing the development of British citizenship, we return to the British Nationality and Aliens Act of 1914 where Lima suggests in her article that the Act “seems to have been concerned with who could be *included* rather than who should be *excluded* from being part of the Pax Britannica” (ibid.). She stresses the Conservative Party’s focus on renewing the perception of Britishness by recognising the influence of the multiple ethnicities united under the British government in several following parliamentary statutes (ibid.).

Following the landing of the *S.S. Empire Windrush* in 1948, however, an increasing expression of anger and discontent about the non-white population among the British Isles arose and was fuelled by politicians. The more immigrants from the colonies arrived the more their otherness was emphasised by white Britons (see Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 81). As a member of parliament, Beresford Craddock for instance, openly shared common prejudices about black people’s sanitary habits, sexual drives and alcohol abuse and added fuel to the division of blacks and whites (ibid.). Enoch Powell’s speech “Rivers of Blood” further emphasised the difference of white and black Britons by separating “their” country from “our” country (ibid.). This strong distinction between the born white Britons and non-white population entered a new level when violent protests and persecutions against blacks began. In several cities and neighbourhoods across the country black Britons had to fear violent attacks from angry mobs (see Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 82).

This type of public incitement of the masses was fortified through politicians like Margaret Thatcher playing on the fear of Britons being “swamped by people with a different culture” (ibid.). The hypocrisy of such attitude was of course apparent against the British history – of imposing their culture and religion onto their colonies through dictating educational plans and naming their new territories after their native land. It is reported that immigrants from the West Indies came with a sense of familiarity to their Motherland and were probably astonished when they were met with indifference and even rejection due to their alienness (see Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 80f). Growing up with idealised images of their Motherland, the immigrants from the colonies were not prepared to enter such a different reality than which was portrayed to them through books and tales. Their expectations of arriving at an orderly, peaceful place were shaken by their experience with an overwhelmed British society. These observations deal with the fact that Britons had a rather clear cut perspective of what Britishness meant. Lima describes it as an “urgency in adding ‘blackness’ to the national imaginary, for many Britons still wanted to associate Englishness with whiteness and all that is ‘proper’, a reflex deriving

from the myth of cultural superiority that England exported to the colonies to justify its imperial presence there” (53).

Looking at Britain’s political history one can notice its need to stand for itself, independently and without being controlled by other states when making decisions concerning inner or external politics. Before its accession to the precursor of the European Union, the European Economic Community in 1973, Great Britain had great challenges to overcome their fear of losing too much of their sovereignty and imperial influence than gaining advantage for itself (The Guardian 2016). This fear was shared by the public as well as by politicians and seemed to be a constant companion so that Great Britain’s relationship with the EU stayed half-heartedly and eventually culminated in the Brexit in 2017 (ibid.). Lima points out that during Great Britain’s time in the EU, “many British intellectuals have been wondering what it means to be English after the end of the empire and the pressures for the English to plunge into Europe” and goes on arguing that the United Kingdom can no longer comfortably define itself against the European powers at all” (57). One reason for this uncomfortable feeling and loss of identity she distinguishes as the inability to come to terms with being part of Continental Europe. It appears that Great Britain felt only secure and independent when they had special power over other nations without being restricted by regulations or showing consideration and responsibility towards other countries as they had to conform to as members of the EU. The rise of recognising Scottish, Welsh or Irish nationalities as separate from the British one indicates a stronger focus on rather dividing into smaller parts than realising the connecting commonalities. Acknowledging their shared past, however, would certainly include accepting the diversity of cultures coming together under the British crown. Still, identifying with the manifold characters and personalities within British society seems to be very difficult to achieve. Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe claim that

[w]hite British people have exhibited and sustained a remarkable resistance to black people living in their midst over three centuries. Today’s generation of black writers voice anger and alienation, in a way that recalls the narratives of eighteenth century slaves, and remind us of the enduring myth of ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’. (84)

This bleak outlook is probably not shared by all, considering the fact that Stuart Hall reflects on his own centeredness in British society, describing it as a development from the margins towards the centre (see Arana 19). Furthermore, he even states that an enormous interest of white Britons in being and behaving black emerges and feels “a sense of [...] envy” (qtd. in ibid.). Others would describe the cumulation of Asian, African and European cultures within British writers as a detail which might find an outlet for their new and “interpretable” (Osborne 2) Britishness in literature. Osborne observes that “[t]hey produce literature that combines

diaspora-inflected retrievals and validations while fashioning an authentic ‘British-self’” (ibid.). In a process of taking ownership of the British culture where this new generation of Asians and Blacks grows up, Osborne further notices that they “have claimed their cultural citizenship in the face of social and cultural disregard, and transformed the English language itself, to better equip it as a vehicle for rendering the multiple, multicultural viewpoints in contemporary British society” (ibid.).

By investigating the meaning of ‘black British’ that unfolds more and more as time passes by, the reader could explore how political decisions were contributing in changing its ever-advancing meaning. Just as researchers and affected members of this group helped in finding appropriate definitions, non-white Brits could experience how their identities were being questioned and redefined in order to fathom the multi-diverse reality surrounding them. As labelling processes went on, processes of integration from non-white peoples into the British society happened as well so that now the term ‘black British’ is less conflicting with the public perception.

2.2 Black settlement into British society

Based on our understanding of what black British poetry refers to, the inquiry into its development must now turn to its early history and origin. An informal survey amongst society concerning the question of black traces within British society would probably result in answers mainly pointing towards the great movement of slaves from British colonies to the Isles during the 18th century. Thus, many people would be surprised to find out that few years ago a team of archaeologists published a paper which displayed an interesting perspective on the diversity of the British society (see Kennedy, Wuyts). They revealed that a skeleton found close to York in 1901 belongs to a woman of African descent living during the 4th century. Judging from the goods buried with her, she is assumed to have lived a comfortable life as wealthy daughter or wife (ibid.). Yet another re-examination of a female skeleton confirms the assumption that Africans successfully mingled with other Romans and contributed to a colourful society (see Huntley). This woman is associated to have lived around 245 AD in East Sussex and the analysis of her bones suggest a healthy, prosperous life style (ibid.). The fact that in Roman times not only men were brought from the sub-Saharan African countries to the British Isles to work as slaves for the Roman aristocrats, again puts Great Britain’s history into a new light. These updates on the shaping of the British society and its diversity as we know it today point towards the idea that from the first recorded settlements until now the British Isles have always been multiracial and a “conglomerate of various ethnic groups” (Osborne 3). A recent article in *The Guardian* discusses the topic of migration as well and invites the readers to reflect on the

century long history of the making of today's nation (see Roche). Although the most notable stream of non-white Britons happened centuries later, these findings of the earliest settlers of colour contributes to the emerging sense of hybridity within the British society for a positive experience with its history. Lima refers to the year 1555 as the most common date given for the arrival of African people in Britain (see 51). The reason for their displacement were trading interests of white Britons who taught them English to enable trades with Africa (ibid.). Around this time a poem about a black woman was written by a Scot, William Dunbar, and "the inclusion of black servants in the portraits of aristocrats had become a common practice" (ibid.). Moreover, a study conducted by Leicester University supports the existence of a multicultural past by identifying a Yorkshire clan who carries DNA with African features (see BBC *Yorkshire*). This hints again at the culturally diverse background of today's Britons.

In an article about black Britons, Sandhu mentions the expansion of the British empire as the main cause for a rise of black people in the British society during the 17th and 18th century. Especially in the cities with ports, an increase was notable due to the transfer of slaves from the African or Caribbean colonies (see Sandhu). Mostly, these people had to work as butlers or were simply regarded as decorum and often served as company on the long trip overseas (ibid., Bryan 63). The manifold documentation of the inferiority of the black newcomers goes from depicting blacks as simians as far as describing them as an "unhappy race" (Sandhu), defined by their vices (ibid.). However, many were also educated in "prosody, drawing and musical composition" by their owners (ibid.). This educational process consequently enabled black people to contribute their sentiments in literary form to the British body of art as well. Despite some exceptions of friendly relationships between owners and slaves, there were many black people fighting their chained lives and eventually had the chance to flee from their owners (ibid.). When they succeeded, they had to hide away and often had no other income than from stealing or begging (ibid.). Sandhu draws the readers' attention to the fact that "the black and white poor of this period were friends, not rivals" and that intercultural marriages were common, and although however not much approved in terms of the white middle class, an awareness of the closeness between black and white people in Britain develops (ibid.). This is also due to the missing segregation on ships or prison cells which helped propelling establishing a multiculturalism within British cities (ibid.). Overall though, it seems that the British nation found its Britishness especially by segregating from the Other, taking the lack of similarities with those around them as the binding element between those at home (see Lima 50).

These elaborations about the early settlements of non-white people on the British Isles and the deep connections between black and white Britons illustrated that white Britons should not fear

that they are suddenly overrun by non-white citizens. Having this in mind can be helpful in including non-white literary productions to the public understanding from what British culture has been developing.

2.3 Origins of black British writing and later poetry (time and place)

Considering the fact that black and white people throughout Great Britain's history had certain points of connection and were more or less dependent from each other, one could expect a certain kind of cultural exchange happening between these communities. However, records about non-white productions start to appear more frequently much later than from the Roman times. Especially in cities with larger population of people with colour, texts can be dated and retraced. In exploring the origins of Black British poetry, this section is divided into two parts: before 1948 and after 1948. This structure is based on the seminal influence of the arrival of the ship *Empire Windrush* on June 1948 with 492 Caribbean passengers onboard which marked a new era for Great Britain's society with regard to mixing newly arrived and long settled Britons.

2.3.1 Black British writing before 1948

A few centuries later, around the 18th century, different written works (e.g. testimonies, memoirs etc) give information about the lives of black Britons. Accordingly, Judith Bryan reminds us that these incidents “[contradict] the often-held belief that black people only began to arrive *en masse* in Britain from the 1950s” (63; italics in the original). She claims that the “vigorous and dynamic literature” is a “by-product of Britain's cultural history and identity” (ibid.). Referring to Britain as a “nation of hybridity”, Bryan points out that “many other ‘classic’ British writers were not born in Britain either, but in the colonies, whether as colonizers or the colonized” (ibid.). By discussing the works of the most well-known black writers of Britain during the 18th century, she wants to bring to light a mostly forgotten history of the British society and show their still pervading influence (Bryan 64).

In his article on black Britons, Sandhu describes Olaudah Equiano (c.1745-1797) and Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780) as the two best known black British writers (see Sandhu). Bryan adds to these two others, namely Robert Wedderburn and Mary Seacole (64). It seems London played a major role for the writers whose vibrancy and diverse population encouraged them to greater achievements. Bryan articulates it this way: “London was a place where adventures began or ended, where travellers stopped to recover and consolidate before the next foray into the outreaches of the Empire. Equiano's writings show that black people were attracted to the capital in this same spirit” (66). Illustrating this point, Equiano's life reads as interesting and exciting as it could be in these times. After he was enslaved as an adolescent he went on travels

across the seas with his master, an English naval captain, before he stayed in London and received formal education from two ladies he had to work for. It followed a period of working and saving money through selling small possessions which eventually helped him buying his freedom in 1766. As a free man, he joined a team of expeditioners on a ship to explore the Arctic in 1773 (see Bryan 66, Sandhu). Living mainly in London, he was “an active campaigner against slavery – writing letters to the press, participating in public debates and assisting the victims of kidnapping and resale” (Bryan 66). Equiano was the first black person in history to work for the British government through formal employment in 1786. When the government offered poor blacks to transfer them to Sierra Leone, Equiano took up the position as Commissary of Provisions and Stores (Sandhu). After some quarrels with his employers, however, he was dismissed (see Bryan 67). Another great achievement was the publication of his autobiography, which made him famous beyond the British Isles and enabled him financially to travel around Britain to promote the end of slavery (see Bryan 67, Sandhu).

His contemporary’s Ignatius Sanchos’s life was even more exceptional in that he was born on a slave ship and became one of the most celebrated black Britons. When he ran away from his first owners, he was employed as a butler in the Duke and Duchess of Montague’s home, where he was able to teach himself reading and writing. Opening a groceries’ shop with his wife, a white Englishwoman, marked the end of a life in service and the beginning of his celebrated success as literary and music critic. Through his shop on Charles Street, London, he got to know “well-known novelists, actors and artists, with whom he regularly corresponded” and “reinvented himself as a middle-class man of letters, a successful London merchant, and well-known citizen of that town” (Bryan 67). Next to a book about his correspondence with friends, Sancho wrote poetry, plays and a book on musical theory, which contributed to his fame. Sandhu claims that “[h]is life demonstrates a rare triumph of talent and resourcefulness over the poverty and prejudice that snuffed out so many black men and women in 18th-century Britain” (Sandhu).

It seems vital for our understanding of this period of time to have the testimonies and examples of Equiano and Sancho among the greater number of reports about advertised slaves and shackles, demonstrating a diversity of experiences during this time period among people of colour. Although there is no doubt about the severe difficulties other enslaved black people had to endure, there were people who had the possibilities and strength to “lead full and complex lives” (Bryan 67) with receiving education, travelling, maintaining businesses and raising families (see Bryan 67f). Another black man who rose to some fame in the 18th century was Robert Wedderburn who had a strong interest for fighting against the establishment (see Bryan

68). His life was greatly influenced by his experience as a child born to an enslaved Jamaican woman and a Scottish plantation owner. Witnessing his grandmother being flogged nearly to death must have played an important part in turning his rage against authorities (see Bryan 68f). Leaving Jamaica to be on the sea in the Royal Navy was his first step out towards starting a life in freedom and calling upon masses to turn against slavery (see Morris). After his arrival in London he became a Unitarian preacher for the Methodist church and worked as a tailor (see Bryan 68, Morris). To raise the awareness of his fellow black people and mobilise them against the establishment – e.g. arguing for “the right of slaves to kill their masters” (Bryan 68) – was his main motivation and resulted in a sentence of two years of hard labour (ibid.). By publishing his sentiments and experience with life as a slave in several books he gives us insights into the reality of black people during these times and the struggles black people had to face in Britain (see Bryan 69).

Important to illustrate diverse literary activity among black British people during these times is Mary Seacole. Initially a free mixed-race woman, she is an example of overcoming prejudices of multiple kind (see BBC *Historic*). Her memoirs give account of her experience as a Jamaican-Scottish born woman in Britain to acquire knowledge and the courage to work within the possible frame. She was raised in Kingston, Jamaica, and worked alongside her mother, a “noted doctress, [who] ran a boarding house [...] popular with army and naval officers and their families, many of whom came seeking medical advice or to convalesce from illness” (Bryan 69). Through this and extensive travelling around the American continents she learnt nursing and medical treatment of tropical diseases in a way only very few women of her time and of either class could equal her (see Bryan 69, BBC *Historic*). During the time of the Crimean war she established on her own expenses and initiative, a home for British soldiers and cared also for the wounded on the battlefield (ibid.). Through public fundraising and notable friends like Alexandra Princess of Wales she was able after her return to London to maintain a comfortable life style and acquire some wealth (see BBC *Historic*, Bryan 70). Although her memoirs “The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands” remain her only literary contribution to British literature, it is important for recognising what impact education and freedom on black British lives had (see Bryan 69).

These and similar contributions by black Britons to the British literature, which vary in form and range as well as regarding the literary expertise, can be conceived as the basis for future black British writers due to their acknowledgment and public recognition. Despite the frustrating and restricted situation for coloured people during the 18th and 19th century black

Britons found their ways to raise their voices and claim their rights as parts of the British society.

2.3.2 After 1948

The arrival of the Empire Windrush on 22 June 1948 marked a new era for Great Britain with regard to mixing newly arrived and long settled Britons. When 492 Caribbean passengers demounted the ship at Tilbury Docks they were greeted by all sorts of attitudes. Interest, happiness and anger were just a few one can imagine having welcomed the newcomers. As Saffron Alexander recounts a contemporary naming education as his motive to come living in Britain (see Alexander), it is clear many migrants came with great expectations and the will to strive for improving their chances in life by moving to their 'Mother Country' (see The Guardian 2017). However, only "few of the migrants intended to stay in Britain for more than a few years" (Phillips, The Guardian 2017). Those who stayed had to deal with limited access to and exclusions from social and economic life and began to create their own spaces within their new surroundings (ibid.). Some generations after their settlement in Britain, voices called for the recognition of the significance of this day in June almost seventy years ago (see Alexander). These newcomers were not only the driving force for establishing the Notting Hill Carnival as part of celebrating life in Britain with fellow Britons, but also majorly contributed to the remodelling of Britain's self-image (see Phillips), which still challenges British lives. For reasons of displacement and finding one's place in a foreign and sometimes hostile environment, many Caribbean but also Asian migrants felt encouraged to write down their autobiographies to tell their stories about moving to Great Britain (see Reichl 22). It appears that especially Caribbean writers were drawn to produce literature and are reported to have written around 130 novels in twenty years (ibid.). As poetry was more and more used by black Britons during the 1960s and 1970s to make people aware about their struggles in society and the challenges they face with joining this community, the corpus of British literature was now enriched by a variety of works produced by black British poets (ibid.). Influential writers from that time are for example Linton Kwesi Johnson and Grace Nichols. They remain to influence the black British literature scene and encourage young writers to stay productive.

2.4 Post colonialism's role in black British poetry

It is clear that the expansion of the British nation and colonialism played a vital role in the development of black British poetry. To understand this connection more fully, post colonialism provides a helpful analytical tool. Diving into post colonialism one first notices the difficulties in defining the term. Many tend to have a similar understanding of colonialism and so we readily arrive at the conclusion that post colonialism deals with everything after the time of the 1960s.

However, problems arise when we start investigating colonialism further. The questions concerning its start and end are not easy to answer due to the fact of definitions (see Childs, Weber and Williams 3f). For example, there is agreement that there are no official colonies of European countries any more. Looking at some relationships and ties between states, it becomes clear that one might not so easily assume that colonialism has ended. Since sovereign states such as Great Britain or the United States of America officially don't supervise and influence other countries any more, the assumption is, we are beyond maintaining forms of colonialism, now seems to be full of flaws. As Childs, Weber and Williams note,

[i]n the period after decolonization, it rapidly became apparent [...] that although colonial armies and bureaucracies might have withdrawn, Western powers were still intent on maintaining maximum indirect control over erstwhile colonies, via political, cultural and above all economics channels, a phenomenon which became known as neo-colonialism. (6)

In the case of the United States of America and its ties with Afghanistan we see how complex the problem with modern forms of colonialism can become. Although the USA does not govern political activities, it continues shaping Afghanistan's future by supporting the country not only with arms, but also rebuilding its social structures and more by having permitted access to various Afghan facilities. How far the influence of Western countries like Great Britain or the USA really reaches, can only be grasped when going into detailed analysis which goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, to understand a little bit the context of this section, it seems vital to draw some attention to the complexity of the meaning of colonialism. To go further and explore post colonialism in black British poetry, the reader will be presented with attempts of defining post colonialism and the nature of its connectedness with black British poetry. There might appear different ways of spelling, because writers don't agree with one form. However, this will not affect its inherent meaning. The following two sections deal with the attempts of defining post colonialism as well as the specific connection between post colonialism and black British poetry.

2.4.1 Attempts of defining post colonialism

Striking for a novice reader of post-colonial theory are the many ways that the time after 1970s can be described and perceived. One has to be aware of sometimes subtle and slight differences of the term concerning time and subject of interest. Justin D. Edwards poses a question at the beginning of his readers' guide to Postcolonial Literature to acquire a common understanding of postcolonialism, as it is such a broad and diverse field. Edwards goes on to list definitions from the *Shorter OED* and *Longman's Dictionary*. Along their lines, "postcolonialism" is concerned with what 'occur[s] or exist[s] after the end of colonial rule. It is a condition that

arises out of political independence” or a “period following a colony’s achieving independence” (qtd. in Edwards 10). From an Anglocentric/Eurocentric point of view, decolonisation processes have its start in the late 1950s and reach a milestone in the 1960s, when more and more countries became independent (see Childs, Weber and Williams 3). Edwards’ further attempts of explaining the meaning of postcolonialism include Hong Kong’s challenging situation as freed nation from the British Crown in 1997, however being immediately absorbed by the Chinese government afterwards. This problem points at the complexity with which analysts struggle finding an appropriate frame for their research. Therefore, Bart Moore-Gilbert is cited stating that

[s]uch has been the elasticity of the concept ‘postcolonial’ that in recent years some commentators have begun to express anxiety that there may be a danger of it imploding as an analytic construct with any real edge [...]. [T]he problem derives from the fact that the term has been so variously applied to such different kinds of historical moments, geographical regions, cultural identities, political predicaments and affiliations, and reading practices. As a consequence, there has been increasingly heated, even bitter, contestations of the legitimacy of seeing certain regions, periods, socio-political formation and cultural practices as ‘genuinely’ postcolonial. (Edwards 10f)

With this in mind, it seems to be even more vital that writers need to define their understanding of terminology, as Zabus points out in her review of Peter Childs’ *Modernism and the Post-Colonial: Literature and Empire 1885–1930*. In this respect, Childs works, as well as the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* (Edwards 10), “with the Antipodean troika’s definition of the then hyphenated term ‘post-colonial’ to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Zabus 308). With this definition one moves towards gaining a more holistic view on the effects of imperialism and starts by investigating its roots. This helps to create a more profound understanding for the established cultural forms within the influencing forces of the colonising powers. It also emphasises the impact of the territorial occupation by foreigners on whole generations who partly never experienced the conditions under colonialism. Gina Wisker’s understanding of postcolonialism ties into this description and quotes Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin who define postcolonial studies as means “to examine the experiences, processes and effects of European colonialism, and reactions to it, from the sixteenth century up to and including the contemporary responses of neo-colonialism” (qtd. in Wisker x). Although she doesn’t distinctly limit the range of postcolonial literature, she refers to it as literature that “is produced and written as a political, ideological engagement with the experiences of colonisation and imperial rule” (ibid.). Therefore, in her book she includes “key historical contexts and key concepts which inform and underpin that literature” (ibid.). Trying to identify the aim of postcolonial literature, Edwards

names criticism and theory as “scrutinising power relations and resisting imperialist prerogatives [...] to reshape meanings in light of dominant hegemonies and powerful ideologies” (11). Within this frame, Wisker relates to postcolonial studies also as a development “as part of a postmodernist fundamental questioning of the established literary canon” (xi). When dealing with this topic in more depth, she argues that “the interpretation of the word ‘postcolonial’ suggests both *after* colonialism and imperialism, and *in opposition to* colonialism and imperialism” (ibid.). Consequently, readers are required to read texts from that time with conscious minds and alertness to grasp the fine and subtle nuances hidden therein. In mapping out the fast-developing area of postcolonial literature, Wisker draws attention to the reader’s willingness to gain or being already prepared with cultural and contextual knowledge when reading postcolonial texts (see xii). This would imply to learn

about why [the texts] were produced, how, where and to what ends, what they might be arguing, why they are exploring or arguing about those issues in those ways and even the forms which the texts themselves take. (ibid.)

Studying postcolonial literatures in depths would also advance the analysis of issues

about the differing ways in which literatures produced by writers from very different cultural backgrounds, geographies, religions and literary traditions [which are] classed together under the same identifying words. (ibid.)

Shedding more light on the multifaceted range of topics mentioned in postcolonial literature, Wisker emphasises the fact that there are also multiple layers of perspectives, which can be elaborated and critically assessed while reading postcolonial texts. She refers to issues and mindsets such as psychoanalysis, linguistics or feminism as readers are continuously reminded of oppression in varying forms and unfamiliar use of language or vocabulary (see xiif). By conscious reading one will explore this framework with all its facets and be surprised by its richness. Due to this notion Wisker uses postcolonialism “to include the whole range of perspectives and influences on our reading and to identify writing and oral production produced both in opposition to and after colonialism” (xiii). Childs, Weber and Williams also express similar thoughts, when analysing the use of “inscribe”. They observe that the word does not come without implying the presence of an “Other” which in the context of post colonialism develops into an almost “paradoxical post-colonialism, which, not content with beginning at the moment of colonization [...], potentially starts years, even centuries before colonialist incursions.” (5). After a few attempts to provide a general overview on post colonialism, where it came from, where it is located today or when it happened and what it is, Childs, Weber and Williams arrive at the conclusion that studies in post colonialism are supposed to be interdisciplinary and engage specialists as well as writers and thinkers, in general, in

constructive discourse which expands public understanding (20f). With these observations in mind and applying an attitude that signals understanding for the challenges of non-white British writers, black British writing would probably profit from this as well. Without being only confined to describing something foreign and other than white, black British poetry's style and use of language would be more at the centre of interest.

2.4.2 The connection between post colonial literature and black British literature

Although "black British" as a term has been applied since the 1950s, it was still not yet a literary category. What would now be called black British poetry existed within the category/framework of Commonwealth or post-colonial literature. Criticism regarding these labels and their perpetuation of post-colonial dynamics however paved the way for black British poetry as a category. These labels of literature were tied to the challenge of scope and whether language would be the main determinant in defining a category.

What might have started off with the expansion of the British Empire could now be seen in the increasing influence and use of English as a global language. Schäfer argues that this development had its beginning with Shakespeare and differs from other widely used languages from the past, like Greek or Latin, in its limitless distribution through modern media (see 3). This allows to form a "global village", a "linguistic community" without being a "political unit" (ibid.). More and more countries apply English in official settings next to their other mother tongue(s), which propels the progress of English as a world language without belonging to one nation alone (ibid.). This development makes it difficult to explain English literature which has its beginning as a field of scientific research in a Britain of the 19th century and that was re-affirmed in 1921 (see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 3). While there is no substantial proof to the claim that the establishment of imperialism was a product of this academic discipline (ibid.), traces can be noted, which show a development towards a more distinct consciousness about what Englishness/Britishness means and what does not conform with this notion (see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 3f). This had great influence on the general perception of British literary tradition and propelled its hegemonic status (ibid.). Traditionally produced by Brits or Americans in their homelands, English literature quickly evolved into a field which comprises South Asian writers composing their work in India as well. Obviously, this fast-growing amount of literature in English caused challenges for adequate studies and analyses so that soon separate categories, such as American or Australian Literature, were established according to its national borders (see Schäfer 3f). However, difficulties did not stop to arise, since it was

accepted practice to exclude immigrant authors from 'English' literature, despite the fact that some of them have been living in the United Kingdom for many years and have also chosen English settings. (Schäfer 5)

Neglecting the writers' link "by language" and their contribution to a "world-wide English-speaking culture" (King 10) seemed for some researchers the wrong approach. Tiffin, an advocate of Commonwealth Literature for example, argued for more comparative studies among these, regarding

the importance of this general framework for the consideration of individual national and regional literary traditions in English as a check against assertion of exclusive national characteristics, and as a pointer to individual and revealing differences between post-colonial literatures in English. (19)

While others were not so keen in generally comparing literature written in English, Tiffin refers to the underlying reasons, claiming the discipline's name as challenging due to "political overtones; secondly and more importantly, the problems of scope" (23). To overcome these challenges, she supported the idea of creating a new name for this field of literary research, admitting, however, at the same time the difficulty of finding a pleasing one (ibid.). Her analysis of the term 'post-colonial' points at

the obvious difficulty of needing political explanation: one needs to explain that this does not refer to particular dates of achievement of independence from Britain or to a mood of political embitterment, but to a set of shared circumstances that have a fundamental effect on the literature produced in those areas, and are likely to continue to do so. (23f)

Nevertheless, she saw the benefits of this term lying in the opportunity to compare texts with British literature where possible.

Critics of the by now outdated term 'Commonwealth Literature', such as Salman Rushdie, feared the negative effects of "ghettoisation" (McIntosh 193) that would minimise the wide scope and diversity of the term English literatures and put emphasis on race, class and other irrelevant dichotomies (see McIntosh 193f). Another problem with calling black Britons post-colonial subjects or citizens from the Commonwealth continuously positions them outside the British Isles although their birthplace is just there (see McIntosh 195). By doing so, an artificial border is created between whites and non-whites who might permanently wonder about their identity and belonging and never feel fully at home. Meandering between home and somewhere else is furthermore reinforced by the public perception which appoints the acting agents in designing the country's future and often leaves out the modelling force of blacks in its past or present (ibid.). However, the rather new generation of non-whites in Britain display a confident

consciousness about this in-betweeness and elaborate on this challenge in their texts. Moving away from the label of “post-colonial literature” instead “black British poetry” provided these individuals with the opportunity to simultaneously identify as black and as British. As “Britons by birth and acculturation, but who are not always figured as such, or even see themselves as such, due to their connections to other places” (McIntosh 197), they adopt an important role in changing the idea about the society they live in and “to reframe Britishness itself” (McIntosh 198). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin even claim that this is now possible since

imperial expansion has had a radically destabilising effect on its own preoccupations and power. In pushing the colonial world to the margin of experience the ‘centre’ pushed consciousness beyond the point at which mono-centrism in all spheres of thought could be accepted without question. In other words the alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial world to the ‘margin’ turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which all experience could be viewed as uncentred, pluralistic, and multifarious. (12)

2.5 Summing up the role of colonialism in shaping the rise/origin of black British poetry
Our excursion into the early history of black British poetry shows that colonialism was decisive to the development of this literary category in two ways. The first way is the obvious fact that the expansion of the British kingdom means that people of different backgrounds were connected to Britain and that slaves were brought to its territory and consequently more individuals who could be labelled British or connected to Britain contributed with written works. The second way which colonialism defined this category is that the written works which provided the foundation for black British poetry (e.g. the examples explored of Sancho and Equiano) naturally were shaped by themes such as freedom and struggle against oppression and the institution of slavery. However, it has also been shown that the struggles associated with colonialism did not define all themes and content of black British Poetry. The diversity of experience even during the early settlement period also came through (e.g. Mary Seacole).

Propelling the development of black British poetry was the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948. For these newly arrived, in facing displacement and a foreign and sometimes hostile environment, writing provided an important outlet and the post-Windrush period produced e.g. autobiographies telling their stories about moving to Great Britain (see Reichl 22). As it was stated, especially Caribbean writers contributed to this period of rich production with e.g. 130 novels in twenty years (ibid.). Poetry crystalized as an outlet for black Britons during the 1960s and 1970s to make people aware about their struggles in society and the challenges they face with joining this community. Similar to the debates about how to define post colonialism, were debates about how to define the literature which was created in part as a result of colonial

realities. From earlier labels such as post colonial literature or Commonwealth literature, a need for precision, and a re-claiming of words such as “black” contributed to the emergence of the term black British poetry.

Having explored the origins of black British poetry as well as analysed the key ways in which colonialism influenced its rise and early history, this paper will now look to the second developmental milestone of black British poetry: recognition- and which role the British canon played in this regard.

3. British Canon and black British poetry

Discussion on how British poetry has been influenced by various forces and peoples invariably involves the formation of the canon of British literature. In these debates, academics of different fields argue back and forth how to structure the canon. Although they seem to have the common goal of organising the literary landscape and promoting courses on diverse literature, their divergent viewpoints make it difficult to arrive at any decisive conclusion.

In their approaches to literature, they follow different schools of thought which are partly aesthetic, historical, sociological and of other nature. Obviously, the undertaking of creating a shared collection of texts which sufficiently represents each understanding of British life is complicated. To understand how the Canon’s role for developing black British poetry – to see if, how and why black British poetry was represented in the British Canon, it is helpful to understand the meaning and the workings of the canon. This will be attempted in the following sections by looking at the definitions of a Canon as well as through analysing the agents behind the processes of inclusion. Reasoning behind including or excluding certain texts seem important to study. Moreover, when discussing these issues, I thought it would be helpful and interesting to see what kind of power is at work when texts are represented in the canon. Through giving examples of black British poets who are included in the Canon and by analysing samples of their work, the role of the Canon in amplifying or silencing black British voices in Great Britain will be reflected.

3.1. Defining the canon

To explore the conceptual and semantic meaning of canon it seems valuable to look at the word’s origins. It is derived from the Hebrew word כנה (see Kruger 2) which took on the meaning of “reed” and later on “standard” (see Ulrich 22). It was passed on by the Greek κανών and eventually was used to describe texts from Judaism forming the Holy Book we now know of as Bible (see Kruger 2, Poirier 457). At that time, the Greek word was translated as “rod” or “measuring stick” and even developed the meaning of “norm” or “ideal” and even “list” as

Ulrich points out (22). Apparently, in theological studies there is a lively debate about differentiating between the terms “scriptures” and “canon”, marking a vital difference regarding authoritative reasons and completeness of a text (in this case the Bible). Whereas “scriptures” seem to describe the finalised version of the collection of theological texts, canon as a corpus of biblical texts is mainly used to distinguish from a limited range of texts called Scriptures (see Poirier 457f). In this discussion, the establishment of a shared conceptual understanding and use of “canon” is however greatly emphasised. Another interesting aspect to mention here, is the inability in (historical) theological studies to agree on one common definition to describe a selection of texts from different sources which all circle around the shared theme of spiritual experience in a specific period of time. Although the texts have at least one detail in common they are partly grouped along other parameters.

Overall, these deliberations foster the understanding of the concept of canon as it is used in British literature. The etymological origins of the word also serve as a basis for this strand of use and develop their meaning as “ideal” or “list” further. In current dictionaries one finds definitions such as in *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*: “(1) a law, principle, body of law, or set of standards, enacted or endorsed by a competent authority, “accepted as axiomatic and universally binding”; and (2) an officially recognized set of books; “any comprehensive list of books within a field”; “the works of an author which have been accepted as authentic.” These definitions are similar to the ones listed in the *American Heritage Dictionary*: a canon is a “group of literary works that are generally accepted as representing a field”, “[t]he works of a writer that have been accepted as authentic” or a “basis for judgment; a standard or criterion”. An addition to these statements are the words by George P. Landow who declares that “[t]o enter the canon, or more properly, to be entered into the canon is to gain certain obvious privileges.” He further stresses that

[t]o appear in the Norton or Oxford anthology is to have achieved, not exactly greatness but what is more important, certainly – status and accessibility to a reading public. [...] Belonging to the canon confers status, social, political, economic, aesthetic, none of which can easily be extricated from the others. Belonging to the canon is a guarantee of quality, and that guarantee of high aesthetic quality serves as a promise, a contract [...].

In his introductory article on the Victorian canon, Landow comes to the conclusion that only an entry in the canon makes the work and its author immortal whereas exclusion of it would “thrust [them] into the limbo of the unnoticed, unread, unenjoyed, un-existing.”

Comparing these notions to today's practice of collecting texts and labelling them by putting them into anthologies, one notices that those definitions and observations were and still are

applied today. Another addition to a more complex understanding of the meaning of canon is mentioned by Alison Donnell. She refers to its theological background and the maintaining importance of “the intertwining elements of judgement, law and education” (190). Pointing towards Matthew Arnold’s application of “canon”, Donnell raises the issue of incorporating the aspect of “moral benefit” (190) into the conceptual framework. Introducing this idea to the debate of his time, other thinkers as for example F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot would pick it up and develop it further. Whereas Leavis is said to connect aesthetics with morality in order to maintain a certain notion of civilisation, Eliot links his spatially and chronologically defined literary tradition to “possibility of intertextuality” (see Donnell 190). What is more, Donnell turns the reader’s attention to colonialism’s influence on our perspective on literature today. Her approach to canonicity raises questions regarding the canon’s establishment and the interplay of values connected to literary work (see Donnell 190).

Consequently, dealing with colonialism and morality, notions of authority and power gain emphasis and bring us back to the previously mentioned definitions found in dictionaries. Since critique against canonical writing was raised especially within post colonial theory, it becomes also apparent how “a version of world-views, values, perceptions and forms of writing which largely ignored, neglected or excluded the different experiences of colonised people and those under imperial rule” (Wisker xi) was imposed on the reader. An analysis of notions such as these and in what kind they are apparent in recent anthologies will be explored in the following sections.

3.2. Forming a canon and its power

In the definitions above it was explained that the selected literary works of a canon can serve to represent a nation’s traditions. Discussing the conceptual framework of the canon, these definitions play a great part in creating connotations and assumptions about both the works and the nation which is said to be represented by these. Along those lines, forming anthologies which claim completeness becomes a heavy burden. On the one hand, one needs to have great knowledge of literature to be able to judge each work sufficiently. On the other hand, publishing anthologies as a canon implies having a respected reputation as author and a well-founded feeling for a nation’s history and society. Moreover, if canon formation not only has the task to illustrate what is there, but also to decide a nation’s future perspective on literary works, it demands wise judgement. One also has to bear in mind that

[t]he subversion of a canon is not simply a matter of replacing one set of texts with another. This would be radically to simplify what is implicit in the idea of canonicity itself. A canon is not a body of texts per se, but rather a set of reading practices [... that]

are resident in institutional structures, such as education curricula and publishing networks. So the subversion of a canon involves the bringing-to-consciousness and articulation of these practices and institutions, and will result not only in the replacement of some texts by others, or the redeployment of some hierarchy of value within them, but equally crucially in the reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts through alternative reading practices. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 189)

It seems, however, to be a constant struggle in recent times to build on this practice without hurting feelings of specific groups of authors, especially with regard to black British poetry. The complex processes behind forming a canon and choosing specific works out of the vastness of existing texts with British background require thorough analysis and will now be examined further. Investigating the process of selecting texts will also deal with questions considering the purpose of anthologies nowadays and their rigidity. These will hopefully then provide a clearer understanding of the conceptual framework that accompanies the canon.

3.2.1 Agents behind canon formation

While getting closer to the meaning of canon, structuring processes come increasingly into focus and draw attention to the issue of the authors of a canon. Doing research on canon formation seldom points at the actual authors of one common work resembling “the” canon, which makes it difficult to exactly pin down a responsible institution or person. In this respect, Prendergast makes an interesting observation, when asserting

that the canon maintains a kind of magical quality – seemingly springing from nowhere and caused by no one. Part of the reason for this seeming lack of agency is that the traditional means by which we explain the canon (history and authorship) are inadequate. They omit the extent to which the text plays a role in its own canonicity by speaking to our occulted relationship to the past. (239)

Nevertheless, there are hints towards groups or individuals who are listed to have published anthologies for different reasons. Some groups of academics seem interested to provide a specific readership with an extensive list of works for academic and educational purposes. Other individuals rather seek to contribute a contrasting list to the ones at hand to present unfamiliar works to an extended public. Their reasons stem mostly from the motivation to shed light into corners of literature and society which are considered as unknown and foreign. This development is also described by Fernando Galván, who observes that

[t]he English literary canon has experienced an impressive readjustment in the last few decades. This revolution, as is well known, had not only involved the opening of the canon to *other* writers and texts, forgotten or marginalised in the *official* canon traditionally read and taught in school. It has also meant a rereading, a reinterpretation, on canonical works. So the new canon cannot be described exclusively on the basis of

additions and recovery, but also, and perhaps mainly - because this entails a challenging hermeneutical process -, as a result of new ways to read old texts. (187)

In the following analysis, I have decided to divide the groups of creators of canons to allow a more detailed elaboration.

3.2.1.1 Authorities

The first group appears to be a rather anonymous group of individuals working in the field of literature who claim to have special insight due to their professions and want to contribute to a nation's cultural wealth. By publishing lists of works of their choice they reach a large audience which broadens their influence on the perspective of the literary landscape at hand. This happens especially in an academic surrounding when professors of literature either create their own lists or quote already existing ones. Sandra Courtman observed that

a disproportionately small number of writers and their works continue to be circulated within the academy. The critical practices that shore up this selectivity are hidden, yet robust. [...] how is it that certain writers and their works are canonized whilst others are dismissed. We [as scholars] attend to the general processes of canonical flux and try to understand how cultural forces' shifts in taste move writers in and out of the literary canon. (55)

Courtman's comment on the academic way of working with literature illustrates a somehow passive perspective on canon formation which seems to be an almost mysterious process, hidden from reflective minds. It rather seems that "[c]anons are most typically (and conservatively) preserved and dictated by the major instructional anthologies" (Ramey 117). Examples for such an anthology Ramey suggests are *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and *The Longman Anthology of British Literature* (117). Ann Kelly writes about the *Norton* that it "generally projects the idea that English culture is self-contained, homogeneous, and defined primarily by the writings of upper-class High Church men" (9). Therefore, only using this as a representation of British culture would deny the fact that the left out productions by black Britons had also great influence in shaping the British society (ibid.).

Despite this notion of being unable to actively affecting the canon's development, there are institutions called into being by politics with the aim to collect and research the British literature to provide the nation with an overall impression of their cultural production. The British Arts Council represents one authoritative institution which was founded after WWII as part of "the intellectual reconstruction of Britain" and "the remobilization of British national identity in the wake of imperial decline" (Folorunso 76). Folorunso assumes that the reason for forming the Arts Council was the belief in a "simple correspondence between 'culture and nation'" (77). He

dismisses the argument that the Council's establishment was "to teach and possibly legislate on culture" (76) and points towards the opposing view by Raymond Williams who "situated this postwar modernism and management of the arts within a political framework, and identified the way in which culture could no longer be determined solely in aesthetic terms" (77).

While the academic approach appears to be vague without pointing in a clear direction, it probably follows the purpose of teaching fine literature and puts emphasis on the aesthetics of a text. As it proves difficult to judge one's perception for beauty, the lists suggested by professors might be conceived more as guidelines for individual study than as fixed catalogues. Yet, their interpretation of the literary production of British authors seems vital for institutions such as the Arts Council. As Folorunso was mentioning its purpose of bringing politics and aesthetics together, canon formation with this background is assumed to present a holistic perspective on literature as it is influenced by the outside. It would seem that when the purpose of an anthology or a selection on literature is clearly defined and reflectively discussed, choices and decisions can be made more transparent and accessible and the public is able to trace these decisions and influence them.

3.2.1.2 Others

The endeavour of making literature more accessible to a larger audience also motivates other writers and thinkers to create lists of works that are perceived as influential for the nation's cultural heritage. One example for an anthology which concentrates on shifting the readership's focus towards black British literature is James Procter's *Writing black Britain 1948-1998*. His list of works is interdisciplinary and chronologically organised. Procter attempts to present a more holistic image of black British literature by preparing a historical frame to move away from immediacy and concentration on the present (see Procter *Writing* 8f). Another way of introducing readers to new literature without acting on authoritative terms was chosen by the magazine *Wasafiri*. In 1984 it started as a branch from the *Association for the Teaching of Caribbean, African and Asian Literatures* (ATCAL) and is now very successful in publishing its own newsletter and bulletin (see Low 182). The founding editor Sushelia Nasta summarises their approach of publishing that "[their] intention is to give serious literary coverage to the excellent writing that is being produced in this country [Britain] and abroad and to provide a forum for debate" (Low 183). She further describes their goal "to both establish a sense of authenticity and to promote cultural diversity" (ibid.). Regarding *Wasafiri*'s influence on the reading public one wants to point out that its parent organisation ATCAL was founded in Britain to draw the British public's attention to writers of Caribbean, African and Asian decent and to open school curriculums to their works (see Low 182). Although one could claim upon

this background that the magazine acts on authoritative grounds, my reason for including it in this section was its concentration on unknown writers especially with black British ancestry. This makes it a magazine within a rather defined community of readers and points at its potential to grow.

3.2.2 The Canon's influence and power

Keeping the features of the canon and the forces shaping it in mind – its impact on society and influence on readers cannot be diminished. The power that it holds, is probably not immediately apparent to the public, yet can be traced in terms of success of authors and reading lists in schools as well as more subtly in the cultural dimensions and perception of a nation. In their introductory essay to *Black British Writing*, Arana and Ramey observe “that the newest literary works entering a canon do not merely tack themselves onto the end of it, but in fact reconfigure the very essence of that canon, transforming the present sense of its historical past and of its literary traditions” (Arana and Ramey 1). At this point, the authors note that, despite his migrant background, T.S. Eliot accomplished a complete acceptance by the British society and developed into “the very embodiment of Britishness and who helped through his critical exertions to define a British literary canon that became even more arcane, classicist, royalist, and selective than it had been before” (Arana and Ramey 1). His influence illustrates the decisive power of authoritative individuals who critically assess the literary production and are the cause to lasting change. Moreover, it shows how vulnerable the canon's construction to personal opinions is.

3.2.2.1 Power of discourse

Understanding the Canon's power means grasping how the Canon influences discourse, both in terms of creating and defining a specific discourse – on e.g. literature – and in terms of shaping its content. Print technology impacted British literature greatly in such that it allowed the distribution of texts and ideas from ancient times. This also triggered the British authors' imagination of producing works including foreign cultures and characters which in turn motivated the British society to portray the exotic Other in their homes (see Kelly 10f). Dealing with new cultures and inviting them to seemingly partake in daily lives must have opened the space for debate among British citizens just as multiculturalism does today. When in the 1990s the movement of “Re-inventing Britain” started, another discourse on cultural diversity emerged. Kadija George Sesay states that “this evolving discourse has come to have a transformative effect on contemporary British culture” (99). This recent development not only draws attention to the varied populations living in Great Britain, it furthermore specifies

that society is made up of an array of constituencies and cultural voices, all of them valid: these include ethnically based artists in general, as well as women's arts and the arts for elderly people, young people, disabled people, and so on, as outlined in the Arts Council of England's Consultative Green Paper. (see Sesay 99)

By observing contemporary habits of behaviour towards the highly diverse society around us, discourses are set in a productive surrounding which "provoke[s] very valuable exchanges about the politics of cultural forms and the wider questions of inclusion and exclusion in relation to national culture" (Donnell 194). Another sign for the impact of canons opening the way for a rather public discourse is mentioned by McLeod in his essay "Fantasy Relationships: Black British Canons in a Transnational World". He states that

[b]y locating selected writers and their work within a distinctly national paradigm, this national-canonical 'technique' has unhappy consequences for the ways in which certain writers are mapped, remembered and read. These consequences must be weighed against the merits in building canons and traditions for important transformative political purposes. (98)

Similarly, Karlberg reminds the reader in the opening sentence to his essay on discourse and power that "the ways we think and talk about a subject influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject" (1). These words forming the core to understanding discourse should then always be in our minds when talking about black British poetry and power relations. As Karlberg analyses power structures, he points out the focus of Western theorists on the concept of power as domination and mentions Foucault who observed "that power circulates throughout societies, constructing social institutions as well as individual subjectivities, as it imposes order and discipline in historically specific ways" (Karlberg 2). Just as canon formation is a process of imposing order it affects the literary landscape and cultural history dramatically as it was already mentioned above. Considering these ideas about the discourse on power, discussing the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the canon seems valuable for achieving a deeper understanding of the formation. When looking at the recent habits of perceiving power as in the concept of "power over", one misses out the possibility to consider power as in its other meaning of "power to". This latter meaning has been called power as capacity by Karlberg and includes schematic distribution of equal and unequal power relations between two parties (see Karlberg 5, 8f).

It appears that the ongoing debates in canon formation rather deal with the concept of power as domination and look at the canon as a selecting entity creating disharmony and a two-class system in literature. Therefore, excluded poetry suffers from being not mentioned and being made a subject in the shadow of a dominant force. However, if one regards power as capacity,

one can analyse along the parameters of adversarial relations, which include again competition, but should desirable analyse along mutualistic relations, which target cooperation (see Karlberg 8ff). These observations potentially initialise not only new ways of discussing in- or exclusion, but also looking at an anthology judging works of poets by mainly personal preferences. Especially in the case of excluding works from poets from a certain background, one might consider the impact of talking about excluding them from a “power over”-point of view. Instead of putting some publishers or academics in the place of the dominant agent who has power over the poet and his or her destiny by mentioning their works, one can start thinking about the effects of discussing inclusion from the perspective of “power to” – the power to make decisions in favour of specific writers for example. That could also initiate stronger feelings of agency within the misrepresented groups and illustrate the importance of receiving equal treatment. By putting black British poets in the position of subjects which are dominated by decisions made for them, they don’t receive the deserved respect. Although many critics might not consciously apply a certain kind of stance in discourse, it seems valuable for the outcome to consider the effects of exercising discourse along adversarial or mutualistic relations. Especially a mutualistic approach takes into account the idea that producing poetry is not a competitive process, but rather one of cooperation in terms of contributing to a body of literature in beautiful ways. How the participation in this process then is distributed and judged, represents an illustration of equality or inequality (see Karlberg 10, 12).

3.2.2.2 Power to shape identity

Regarding T.S. Eliot’s remark from above might have created the perception that the canon as it is mainly known today represents next to Eliot himself well-received writers as Chaucer, Shakespeare and Jane Austen. If their use of language was of concern to critics and readers then probably only in terms stylistic expression. Whereas in recent debates about black British literature, language acquired new facets of meaning. Due to their migratory backgrounds authors are sometimes judged by their knowledge of English and its application in literary texts. Unusual use of British English is often perceived as “bastardized, pidgin and uncivilised” (McMillan 134) and stresses the operating hegemonic context. In the wake of a growing diverse population, however,

there is a ‘syncretic’ dynamic which critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and ‘creolises’ them, disarticulating given signs and re-articulating their symbolic meaning. The subversive force of this hybridising tendency is most apparent at the level of language itself where creoles, patois and black English decentre, destabilise and carnivalise the linguistic domination of ‘English’. (Mercer 57)

This process can be observed in literary texts by black British writers who sometimes seem to struggle applying their languages in the appropriate context. As they grow up with a range of languages – for example Standard English, Jamaican patois and street talk (see Sesay 103) – they get used to mix these forms of expression. Sesay illustrates this point by referring to two works, namely “Some kind of Black” by Diran Adebayo and “The Scholar” by Courtia Newland, where she analyses the different uses of languages and explains, how they get more and more mixed and assimilated by the reader, too (see Sesay 103f).

Furthermore, it is mentioned that young people as third-generation migrants rather talk Cockney than their parent’s “Queen English” (Sesay 105). In how far this language shift was propelled by canonical texts can be questioned. Nonetheless, it is important to note that contemporary black British writers sometimes need a different input for identifying themselves with the complex construct the English language has developed into. Caryl Phillips for example explains how he searched for literature which was “both in terms of subject matter, and visage, in [his] ballpark” and was eventually successful in finding US writers such as Leroi Jones, Amiri Baraka or Don Lee (see Phillips 34).

Similar challenges are also described by SuAndi, who “could quote Keats [...] but [who] meant nothing to [her]” (qtd. in Ramey 116f). Yet, as soon as she had discovered the works by Sonia Sanchez, reading her texts “was like a conversation, a precious moment with a mentor, a wise-up session from a mature and ‘*oh-no-you-didn’t*’ older Sistah” (ibid.). In this regard, other poets will probably agree with E. K. Brathwaite who once reflected on the iambic pentameter widely used in British poetry, noticing the difficulties in writing about a hurricane in this metre (see Neumann 59). Many must have felt troubled and dissatisfied when they could not appropriately express their thoughts and feelings in English. It does not come as a surprise then, that these experiences demonstrate the importance of providing access to a great range of texts from writers who share the reader’s background and can associate with one’s challenges in a common language. Since culture is a vital means for establishing one’s identity, Ramey remarks that

[b]lack British poets have been and continue to be central to the processes of revealing and commenting on the disintegration of the old imaginary of old British cultural unity and purity. They are equally important in providing much of the means to repossess, revise, and establish the future voice of what Britain is in the process of becoming [...]. At the same time that they are providing ‘alternative’ perspectives, they are – explicitly and emphatically – products of British culture. (119)

The further the debates around canon-formation go and the more attention is given to defining black Britishness the more pressing becomes the focus on questions on identity. Chris Weedon observes that

[f]or most black and Asian British-born writers, the complexities of the relations between Britain and her former colonies remain important insofar as they continue to affect individual identities and the emotional dimensions of belonging, but their representations tend to relate directly to Britain as the primary place of belonging. (49)

Some individuals struggle to define themselves in these constructs built around black British identities as reported by Walters (see 173). Others, especially scholars, are challenged to present a coherent framework when linking African with British culture (ibid., Arana 20). They have to immerse themselves in partially new fields and are confronted by the vastness of material to display a comprehensive image to their students (ibid.). While academics try to convey meaningfully how different cultural backgrounds are merged and alternative identities created, writers of black British decent deal with notions of belonging in reflective ways.

Looking at Andrea Levy's and Bernardine Evaristo's novels *Every Light in the House Burning* and *Lara*, the reader explores two young women "growing up, as being part of British society" who "only [become] aware as they get older that they may constitute another blend" (Sesay 103). This process of realising the difference between oneself and others certainly demands a reflective mind and space for discourse. In the case of a nation, it also calls for respect and acceptance of the Other and the need to open the national construct for incorporating it without creating an artificial space for it (ibid.). Along society's attempts of establishing a new sense of British identity, young black British writers arise to take ownership in this process and motivate their peers to decide about their future bravely, pragmatically and frankly (see Arana 20). Regarding literary productions, these young black British writers propel a paradigm shift within British literature due to their focus on investigating alternative themes (see Arana 21). By concentrating on the establishment of a new perception of Britishness, "the birth of a new cultural and social movement that is *broader than merely academic* and *broader than specifically literary*" (ibid. italics in the original) is called forth. "It is the multicultural and multiracial [...] mobilization that is proclaiming itself loudly from hundreds of platforms and stages around the British Isles and popularly and officially styling itself as nothing less magnificent than '*Re-inventing Britain*'" (ibid. italics in the original). Summarising the above notions, the empowering forces of the canon which generate and emphasise society forming processes are apparent and vital to understand. However, starting with being represented in

important anthologies, black British writers still depend on a successful correlation between representation and recognition within society.

3.2.3 The impact of representation

Looking at causes which form and shape identity one can notice the influence held by works which are publicly accessible. Therefore, the question of the role of being represented in well-known anthologies is a vital one – not only for poets of non-white descent – in order to be recognised by readers. However, it appears to have a long tradition in British history to neglect the non-white population on the British Isles (see Brennan 6). While Brennan describes Britishness as feeling connected to “polo, the Druids, Cecil Rhodes, skittles” (ibid.) which is “increasingly contested by once-colonised”, he identifies literature “as the ‘pale’ keeping barbarians at bay” (ibid.). Thus, to gain a better understanding of the implications and meaning of the term and concept of representation we will investigate some considerations within the linguistic field and go on to analyse the ways in which works are represented in anthologies.

3.2.3.1 *Linguistic background*

A very simple definition of the term is offered by Stuart Hall who describes representation as the “production of meaning through language” (Hall 16). Here, representation is perceived as the outcome within the abstract system of language which uses signs and signifiers to achieve sense and shared understanding in a conversation. Considering some insights from linguistics, one knows that language is a very complex system which constantly evolves and changes. Due to individual strategies and lack of feasible rules among other things, it is very difficult to define these processes. What can be observed, however, is the need for instruments (e.g. signs and signifiers), which help us negotiate meaning and achieving an understanding of our realities. In conversations with others it might be challenging to express personal insights properly, because we face different realities and come from different backgrounds. Such circumstances make the fluidity of meaning apparent and emphasise the correlation between culture and mind sets (see Hall 21f). The circumstances of our upbringing significantly shape not only our understanding of the world and our cultural being. It moreover dictates the codes in which we perceive our surrounding and come to decisions. Within these deliberations on production of meaning, Henrietta Lidchi describes the process of representation as a manner in which meaning is constructed and conveyed through language and objects (see 153). Put differently, representation depends greatly on our understanding and knowledge of the world as well as our ability to express our thoughts. Only thinking about the concept of a tree will have various forms when drawn on paper depending on where we grew up. Thus, these representations of our thoughts make visible the vast possibilities of seeing reality and the fact that everything is in a constant change. Other questions then arise and open the discourse on the issue of

(in)visibility of things. For example, one could ask for the whereabouts of things which are not expressed due to understanding, ability or will. Would they cease to exist? Or even allowed to be perceived? Although the importance to answer such questions cannot be doubted, I will not deepen the discussion in this respect to maintain the focus of my thesis. Nonetheless, some notions of these will be touched on in the next section with regard to the works by black British writers represented in the canon.

3.2.3.2 Representation of works in the Canon

When analysing the underlying meaning of representation, it was argued that being represented also enhances or even secures visibility. Therefore, poets or writers in general whose works are listed in well-known anthologies have a greater chance to be recognised by a wide-ranging audience than those who aren't mentioned. Ramey illustrates in her article *Contemporary Black British Poetry* the dichotomous relationship of black British poets who have to navigate between standardised poetry, following the footsteps of old British poets, and experimenting with new styles in ways which aren't too bold and daring (see Ramey 115). It seems that as soon as uncommon styles are produced, they fall into the boundless sea of unread literature because of the lack of public recognition. Foucault's and Said's observations here remind us of the dilemma with representation: "acceptable representations are encouraged; deviant ones are not. The tendency of any discourse is [...] to elicit forms of knowledge which conform to established paradigms, in a circuit of mutual reinforcement" (Childs, Weber and Williams 58).

Other limiting factors, which greatly influence the public perception, are the critics' and reviewers' assessment of the creative outcome and the author's biography (see Osborne 9). If reviewers or critics offer a specific stance on the book's content then it becomes difficult for the writer to go astray from this opinion although she had intended a complete different issue to address (ibid.). This experience is apparently widely known and practiced throughout publishing and agenting institutions. When making a report on the integration and representation of non-white British writers in the publishers' scene twelve years ago Danuta Kean's analysis illustrated this by manifold recounts of how writers should change their scripts to be appealing for a white audience (Kean 8f). After being resented by British publishers, some authors described their frustration and shared that they went to other countries like India to be published and were successfully acknowledged by readers there (Kean 10). Exclusion of works may have different shapes and motivations, regarding style, publisher's preference or personal likes and familiarity with the subject of interest. The outcome, however, stays the same and has crucial effects. As Foucault put it, exclusion is "repression operated as a sentence to disappear" and "an affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, an admission that there is nothing to

say about such, nothing to see, and nothing to know” (qtd. in Okpala, 145). Through her report, Kean also shed light on a bewildering development within the publishing industry. She discovered “disturbing evidence of institutional bias, a sense of exclusion and an industry wedded to recruitment methods that undermined diversity rather than promoted it” (2). Alarmed by these findings, institutions like decibel and the Arts Council England programme encouraged counter initiatives to establish more culturally inclusive working spaces and a greater variety of texts (ibid.). However, looking back to again analyse the conditions for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) writers, the outlook was bleak and it seems that “traditional publishers have retrenched and become more conservative in their editorial and employment choices” (ibid.).

These negative developments appear to be results of misguided economic decisions and ever-changing market situations which give publishers the impression that reactionary initiatives like unpaid internships and focusing on already well-known authors would be more profitable (ibid.). The mechanisms of excluding black British works is far from only practiced by publishers or teachers, but also finds critical attention within the black British writers’ community. What is striking is the use of specific parameters which govern individual decisions. One example is pointed out by Jude Chudi Okpala who critically assesses Sesays exclusion of Ben Okri as a black British writer due to his Nigerian background as opposed to England-born Bernardine Evaristo. The reason for Okri’s exclusion from Sesay’s analysis during a conference are described by Okpala as “eclectic hermeneutics, selective reading” which he understands as “*bête noire* of the politics of exclusion” (145). His argument seems to stress a problem many writers fight with and which not only depends on personal favours. This incident only emphasises the importance of tackling invisibility at its roots. When looking more closely at the causes for invisibility or discrimination to expand and exist, there seem to be two strategies enabling it. One appears to stem from a lack of knowledge, the other one would be a conscious decision. The lack of knowledge can probably only be overcome by more research and individual attempts of requiring a more holistic view on the issue at hand. Whereas, the conscious decision can be not only linked back to the issue of publishing only a certain type of texts. As it was mentioned before, publishers are bound in their decision making by favouring one style before others or reasons of financial profitability. Similarly, deliberate choices are made, when one defines background and fashion of the texts and writers for specific purposes, as it was for example done by Bernardine Evaristo. In my opinion, defining the range and scope of one’s work sometimes is necessary to secure a coherent line of thought. In the case of

literature however, if popular publishers or famous writers decide to exclude colleagues they have to be aware of the great backlash for those left out of discussion.

Also worth mentioning here is the idea that influence on British poetry does not only come from the British Isles, but also from the Caribbean Islands or the African continent to name but a few places where some black British poets have their origins. Thus, their poetry is enriched by other forms of using language and atmosphere through their experience of a different life style. These features are signs of difference and so-called otherness and are a contrast to the Western British style of poetry. Attempting to describe the overlaps of the heterogenous group of non-European British poets, Ramazani quotes Stuart Hall in his essay for the *Cambridge Companion to 20th-century English Poetry*, who names hybridity as the writers' shared feature and sees their diaspora identities as the reason for regarding them as one group (see 202). The writers' ability to dislocate their experiences from the metropolis London and leading their readers to a translocal reality without pinning it down to one place gives their poems their specific drive and liveliness (ibid.).

When assigned with finding an appropriate definition for this poetry produced in and around the British Isles by British poets, it becomes a challenge to come up with a comprehensive explanation. Citizens from places all around the world united through a shared passport producing pieces of literary art seem to fight for the recognition from an audience equally diverse as themselves. This circumstance illustrates the transnationality which Britain and increasingly the whole world are facing. However, it appears to be of little help to be overwhelmed and try to stick to century long known approaches to group literary works, when exposed to the vastness of style and range as we are now. This makes visible that we are now almost unable to find appropriate definitions when they require applying the concept of borders. In his essay for the *Cambridge Companion to 20th British Poetry* Jahan Ramazani describes translocal when referring to post colonial or black British poetry "as poetry that reconceives and remaps widely disparate geocultural spaces and histories in relation to one another, particularly in this instance metropolitan Britain as seen by migrants from its former colonies" (200). Arguing that black British poetry is "neither homeless nor homebound, rooted nor rootless" (ibid.), Ramazani rather claims that

[L]ike other postcolonial, diasporic and migrant poetries that mediate between distant yet specific locations across the globe, black British poetry gives expression and shape to a cross-geographic experience, enjambed between the (post)colonies and the Western metropole. (ibid.)

Despite pronouncing the difficulties of a clear understanding of the meaning of “black”, he focuses in his contribution to the *Cambridge Companion* on “diasporic and black British poets with African-Caribbean and African backgrounds, who have played a crucial role in the early and sustained blackening of British poetry” (201). Although Ramazani is aware of the exclusion of all the other poets regarded as “black” following this characterisation (see 201), he adheres to it to “[reflect] the more recent circumscription of the term” (201). His approach to listing poets to represent the British literary tradition, however, leaves some questions regarding the prevalent categorisation of black British poetry. It seems he would suggest even a new categorisation of poets with a migrant background from Asian and Middle-Eastern countries. Adding another category to the British canon would probably increase the difficulties finding appropriate names and distinguishing between each group. As the transnationality of British poets proves already now to be a challenge for the categorising authorities, multiplying the groups for identifying poets according to their national backgrounds might be counterproductive.

3.2.4 Canon as a rigid construct – slowly opening up to inclusion

Literature in Great Britain belongs to one of the most prestigious fields in academia and remains a cornerstone forming British identity and belonging (see Brennan 6). Therefore, “the huge importance of the literary role is popularly rendered in the awesome manuscripts on permanent display at the British Museum or in, say, the figure of Sherlock Holmes, a hero for a land where even the cops are bookish” (ibid.). Being aware of this pride in this rich history, it does not surprise when one studies British literature around the world “as a means of learning one’s civilizational roots” (ibid.). Brennan even claims that it does not only depend on aesthetic taste to be recognised as a writer in Britain, but on Britain’s benevolence towards its minority populations (ibid.). The reasoning behind this argument is the assumption that Britons would otherwise be challenged to give up their former politics of us vs. them, or the Othering of non-white citizens (ibid.). However difficult it seems to open the discourse on British literature to other writers as well, the changes in the canon speak for themselves. At first it seemed impossible for black British artists to be published, but after the mid-1960s publishing houses run by non-whites increasingly became a decisive entity in shaping a new landscape for black writing (Brennan 8). This step, signalling the beginning of new developments within the British literature, opened not only the opportunity for black writers to directly address an audience who could relate to their own experiences. It also means to be more recognisable for the general white readership. This, however, implies sometimes to represent the “exotic and anguish demanded by publishers” (Brennan 9) and comes at the price to be read due to one’s Otherness (ibid.). On the other hand, Brennan notices a definite movement from the outskirts of British

literature into the seriously taken realms of being criticised and compared to existing works and is full of hope for further acknowledgment due to several anthologies which explicitly introduce readers to black British writing (ibid.).

3.3 Represented black British poetry

Since the establishment of a canon, its influence and its problems have been outlined, we will now turn to look at the few black British poets and their works who find acknowledgment by being represented in the canon and are therefore known to a larger audience. In analysing the circumstances for paying them this tribute, I want to find out what made their works or lives differ from others so they proved worthy of being mentioned in the canon. This will also show how the canon has shaped the development of black British poetry. A temporal analysis will be included to find out whether there is a correlation with historical events. It also seems essential to be familiar with some prominent names as they form the first stepping stone for getting to know other writers as well. In the introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)* Osborne explains the frequent presence of some writers with the reason that “a critical consensus exists in which some writers are unilaterally distinguished over others in producing noteworthy literary developments” (14). Reading some writers’ works might help us then to understand their distinction from others. Childs, Weber and Williams note that there is “[o]ne thing, they all have in common [and that] is an attempt to challenge monolithic, restrictive conceptions of identity” (179).

3.3.1 Black British poets included in the Canon

It seems to be a common practice to separate female from male writers when classifying their works due to their style of writing or the topics of their texts. Female writers appear often to be paired with feminist issues or distributing gender roles. Some writers express their concerns about these labelling processes, because they fear their texts become secondary and predefined. Without promoting the habit of gendering works of art or people, it seems nevertheless useful to continue with this practice for the following analysis to gain more insight into the distinguishing parameters. While researching for female writers from West African countries I came across Davidson Nicols’ text on West African poetry where he remarks that “[t]he poetess in West Africa is a rare figure” (119). He draws the connection with the phenomenon with lack of education of girls which only in recent years has begun to change (ibid.). However, this circumstance gave me the impression that there are less well-known poets from West African countries than from the West Indies. Furthermore, reflecting about other widely familiar poets – female or male – led me to the assumption that in general, there are more poets named from the West Indies than from other former colonies. Nasta does, indeed, claim that poets with this background had greater influence on the British literary landscape than others (see 29).

Moreover, she notices that “[t]heir arrival not only marked an important moment in Caribbean literary history, but also laid the ground for a younger generation of largely British-born writers whose works were increasingly visible by the 1980s” (ibid.). The current situation, however, does not mirror this observation anymore, which will be further discussed towards the end of this thesis. To maintain the focus of this paper, only a selection of famous poets will be discussed without claiming their status to be more canonical than that of others.

3.3.1.1 Female poets

In the context of prose fiction, Pallavi Rastogi observes that black and Asian women writers used their writing “to achieve literary self-determination” (77). She further points out that “the recognition of this self-determination forms a matrilineal alternative to the ‘malestream’, and restores women’s creativities and perspectives to contemporary British literature and its post-war history” (ibid.). Rastogi’s observations also uncover the muddled circumstances from which black and Asian women’s writing emerged. As they were all grouped together searching for their identity in Britain, they used writing as their outlet to channel and maybe sort out this confusion (see Rastogi 78). Others produced literature to draw a different picture of black and Asian lives on the British Isles, which did not only deal with immigration, but also with brutality and physical or sexual exploitation in their homes or outside (see Rastogi 81f). The women poets presented here differ from each other regarding birthplace, education and professional development. Yet, what connects them the most might be their sense of ownership and responsibility, as well as their journey to express themselves.

3.3.1.1.1 Una Marson

As one of the oldest poets with great impact on British literary life, Una Marson is a great example of black British women who accomplished noticeable impression both in her Motherland and her place of birth. She was born in 1905 in Jamaica where she grew up and eventually died there in 1965 after years spent abroad and establishing various tools for addressing and discussing issues of race, gender and problems faced by migrant communities (see The Open University (TOU), Tomlinson). Like her countryman Claude McKay she rose to fame in Jamaica, publishing well-received collections of poems, working as an editor and founding her own magazine *The Cosmopolitan*, before moving to London (ibid.). In this surrounding, new opportunities for her arose as she continued to write about women in society (TOU). The growing attention from outside and her involvement in the League of Coloured Peoples and other organisations enabled her to organise different fairs and events which attracted fellow black British artists and widened her networks in British society (ibid.). After Marson spent two years in Jamaica, she began working for BBC in 1939 to arrange interviews to capture glimpses from around the British Empire and contributed in designing radio

programmes (ibid.). During WWII the BBC appointed her as host and coordinator of a programme called “Calling the West Indies”, through which she was known by a greater audience and eventually collaborated with George Orwell in his magazine *Voice* along other well-known and respected writers such as T. S. Eliot and Mulk Raj Anand (ibid.). This project motivated her to plan a similar scheme for the West Indies where she was able to include V. S. Naipaul and Edward Kamau Braithwaite who rose to fame as one of the most famous Caribbean writers (TOU, Tomlinson.).

Concerning her literary work, Tomlinson observes that Marson’s first poems were highly influenced by her upbringing within the British Empire and reflected its Victorian and Romantic notions (see Tomlinson). The more she was challenged with racial prejudices and saw how non-whites were excluded from the European beauty standards, the more she channelled her discontent about this in her poems (ibid.). At the same time, she acquired a new style of writing using vernacular and folklore and addressed issues of cultural belonging, homesickness and other issues of migrants living in Britain (ibid.). Her engagement in several organisations and her literary contributions provided her with the possibilities to work on establishing a literary Caribbean canon and promoting and upholding the West Indies’ culture (ibid.). Una Marson is seen as a key figure in enabling the impact of Caribbean artists and activists on British life and also in shaping young Caribbean’s identities, who sometimes struggled to settle in (ibid.). A closer look at her poems reveals her drive to illumine the public white consciousness about non-whites in Britain and to share the cultural richness of African or Caribbean peoples. The Peepal Tree Press describes her writing as “a complex subject, striving to answer the questions of how to write as a woman; as a black, modern, diasporic subject; for the poor and powerless”. What is more, however, are the diverse shapes her writing takes. In a review of Alison Donnell’s edition of selected poems by Una Marson, Erika J. Walters backs the notion that Marson’s poems appear to be oppositional, when on the one hand she is writing about the beauty of Britain’s daffodils and on the other hand she glorifies Jamaican flowers (see Waters). Therefore, the authors call for freeing Marson’s poems from strict categorisation to let them not suffer from misrepresentation (ibid.). To illustrate the features of Una Marson’s poetry discussed of being two poems are telling:

JAMAICA

Just a lovely little jewel floating on fair Carib’s breast,
All a-glittering in her verdure ‘neath a blazing tropic sky.
Must have been part of Eden, it’s so full of peace and rest,
And the flowers in their splendour make you feel it’s good to die

In a spot that's so near heaven where one never feels depressed,
'Cause Dame Nature makes you lazy and Dame Fortune lingers nigh,
And you feel just like a fledgling in your mother's cosy nest.

Frozen

(Winter 1941)

Europe is frozen.
It is too cold for birds to sing,
For children to make snowmen,
For rivers to splash and sparkle,
For lovers to loiter in the snowlight.

The heart of humanity is frozen.
It is too cold for Poets to sing.

3.3.1.1.2 Patience Agbabi

As a member of U.K.'s Next Generation Poets Patience Agbabi is lauded for her ability to "[pay] equal homage to literature and performance" (The Poetry Archive 2005-2016, The Royal Society of Literature) as well as widely recognised for bringing together new styles of writing with traditional British literary characteristics. One example for this practice is her well-known piece "The Wife of Bafa", where she reinterprets Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath* from the *Canterbury Tales*. Keeping the original structures from a dramatic monologue and the background story line, Agbabi pictures her first person narrator as a Nigerian woman who tells her life story to an imagined audience while trying to sell goods to them. Agbabi's initial intention to writing this poem was to pay tribute to Chaucer and therefore, calls to the reader "to experience the poem on more than one level, to enjoy the surface meaning and the textual intervention" (Agbabi for British Council). Ramey observes that Agbabi refers to many outstanding British poets "who have refused the line of demarcation between page and performance in poetry" (129). Not only Chaucer and his *Canterbury Tales* serve as inspiration, but also Browning (*Dramatis Personae*) or Wordsworth (*Lyrical Ballads*) who provide "emotional and technical support" (ibid.).

Reflecting on her involvement and enthusiasm for giving new life to this old British piece of literary art, one comes to recognise the influence of her British middle-class upbringing. Born in 1965, Patience Agbabi came very early in her life to live with a white foster family who hold close contact with her Nigerian parents. Agbabi describes this transition between cultures as a vital aspect for her multi-layered poetry and gave way for her interest in "borders and boundaries" (Agbabi for British Council). As a teenager, she grew up in Northern Wales which

also influenced her identity as a young woman in Britain (ibid.) just as her studies in Oxford did (Ramey 128). What is striking about her poetry, moreover, is the fluidity which combines old and new, British and Nigerian, stage and page. Ramey claims that “[t]he confluence of forms, poetic values, and intertextualities evident in Agbabi’s works creates a fascinating *mélange*, and is a significant asset to the depth and range of current black British poetry” (ibid.).

Like many other writers, Agbabi distances herself from “limiting and artificial binaries as *performance or page poet, black or British, and high art or popular culture*” and describes these dichotomies rather as “destructive” (ibid., italics in the original). Playing with words and language appears also to be vital to Agbabi’s work and Romana Huk calls her “a games-caller with her audiences, focuses on language as infinitely malleable and constructive of new realities” (228). This ability finds especially output in her performances, where her poems become alive and show their hidden treasures. Examples for this are her performances of “RAPunzel” (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR7V34CY-D4>) or “Word” (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Z530jow2DA>). The former one explores how black women invest time and thought in their hair and how it is part of their identity. The accompanying video shows a woman’s changing attitude towards the looks of her hair. At first, she is compelled to find the right hair products or wigs to conform to a man’s wishes, who is attracted to her. As they have a romantic relationship, she becomes aware of her missing interest in him and rejects him. Confiding in her aunt and sharing her worries, encourages her to emancipate herself from common beauty standards. The poem is composed to be performed or spoken aloud to develop its full potential and meaning according to Agbabi’s attitude as the page and the stage belong together. The sound of this poem reminds strongly on a rap or hip-hop song, but its lyrical expressiveness reveals its poetical essence.

The other poem “Word” illustrates Agbabi’s ability to play with words and let them develop new meanings and situations by mixing them almost blindly together. As a master of reference, the poetess hints at other poems seemingly subtly, but when one is well-versed, one immediately recognises her explicitness (see Huk 228). Maybe these details of clothing old, already existing pieces into new gowns, giving them a personal touch while at the same time discussing her own points of view, makes Patience Agbabi to one of Britain’s most famous and lauded black British poets. Concerning Agbabi’s focus on keeping traditional lyrical forms alive, Huk notes that this could be another reason for Agbabi’s far-reaching success by reassuring her readers of consuming familiar poetry (see 231). Whatever the key for her fame might be, it rewarded her with several nominations, awards and teaching opportunities with great interest from the press (see British Council 2017). She was Canterbury poet laureate in

2009 and was named a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2017 (see The Poetry Archive 2005-2016, The Royal Society of Literature). It seems she has won a secure place in the realm of British literature and continues to impress her readers and listeners with her extraordinary works.

3.3.1.1.3 Jean "Binta" Breeze

Talking about dub poetry or black British poetry influenced by the Jamaican reggae tradition, her name surely must be mentioned alongside her mentor and friend Linton Kwesi Johnson. He is reported to say that Jean 'Binta' Breeze is one of the few who does not only imitate this musical style in Jamaican language, but has created and is creating new forms of lyrical expression (see Taukolonga). Dub poetry is considered to have its roots in "reggae deejay and Jamaican popular culture" (Procter 2008) and displayed a "new orality in Jamaican poetry with an emphasis on spoken language, the Jamaican language, and a strong musical influence" (Johnson qtd. in Taukolonga). It focuses on the word, "the heartbeat" at its centre (see Allen). Some of its most famous contributors are Linton Kwesi Johnson, Michael Smith and Oku Onuora who coined the style and lead the way for other poets. When Johnson became aware of Breeze in the mid-1980s and recognised her originality he invited her to come with him to London (see Metzger). As a supporter of the Jamaican arts movement Johnson intended to propel its progress as well as to draw the public attention to Jamaican cultural richness (ibid.). After a well-received publication of her first collection of poems in Jamaica, Breeze was encouraged by Johnson to publish a second one, which should become her probably most recognised one yet. With "Riddym Ravings" which is now "regarded as a classic in contemporary Caribbean poetry" (Taukolonga), Breeze revealed her struggles with schizophrenia and got her far-reaching reputation as black woman poet in Britain and elsewhere (ibid.). Her sickness had great influence on her work and life, which led her to stop reading and take longer breaks (see Reckord). During these breaks, she had often gone back from Great Britain to Jamaica to recover at the home of her mother, where they both would recite poems for each other in the afternoon just as they used to do when Jean was a child (ibid.). These afternoons not only introduced her to poetry, but opened the way for her future profession and passion throughout her life. Having completed her high school education with A-Levels in several subjects, Breeze started teaching in a secondary school, before moving to different cities, studying one year at the Jamaican School of Drama and becoming more and more involved in political activism and the promotion of women's issues (Procter 2008). Her move to London in 1986 seems to be the climax of a continuously changing life in a relatively short

span of time (ibid.). However, it helped her gaining her reputation as a well-respected poetess who shines in her performances and brings lyric to life. Procter calls her work

as rich and varied as her career (she has worked variously as choreographer, dancer, scriptwriter and director), ranging from childhood memories of Kingston market to the contemporary inner-city streets of London; between subjects as diverse as C. L. R. James and popular Caribbean street culture. (Procter 2008)

Her experiences in life definitely resonate in her writings as it can be seen with her challenges with schizophrenia (see Huk 235). However, when she focussed on writing texts about her impressions and feelings as a black woman from Jamaica, she was suddenly regarded differently. Before, her work was categorised and marketed within reggae or jazz, but after writing about motherhood and women's issues, the music business couldn't label her anymore in the set regulations (see Huk 227). Huk remarks in her observations "that when too female and personal, Breeze's work did not seem *black* enough" (227). Furthermore, Huk looks at Breeze's call for black women poets "to get much more sexual" (Breeze qtd. Huk 229) which would illumine the reality without being stuck in misconceptions and misrepresentations expressed by a predominantly white male community (ibid.).

While this may seem a bold claim, considering the unequal distribution about male stances concerning femaleness, it rather becomes a necessary fact to regain ownership of female issues. However universal her claims are, her writing concentrates on reading the realities, where she comes from and what her own experiences are. When she published *Third World Girl*, she remembered her time in Jamaica, living and working in a hotel at the north coast after hotel chains bought up the coast line (see Taukolonga). Male tourists tended to go after the local women, causing inappropriate situations and problems for the local population (ibid.). As this problem is not foreign to other third world tourist regions, Breeze took up this story line and painted a picture of a beautiful young black woman who stands tall and self-conscious of her choices (ibid.). Notwithstanding the poem's agelessness, Breeze's further work continues to inspire and encourages to stay mindful. The appointment to a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 2012 can be interpreted as a sign for this.

3.3.1.2 Male poets

In contrast to female poets, it seldom occurs that male poets reflect about their gender. Some might write about inequality of women and men or challenges with their homosexual orientation, but issues concerning their manhood as women poets would discuss their challenges as women are not addressed or emphasised. Black British writers are rather known for their political engagement, shedding light on racial prejudices or injustice against minority

groups. Many writers reflect on their experience of their homelands or cultural roots and are therefore judged for their ability of elaborating these concepts, while their female colleagues struggle with historical underrepresentation and the limiting factors of patriarchy (see Rastogi 79). When Nicols reviews West African poetry, he compares the French with the British influence on their former colonies. He remarks that poetry from the French West Africans “is more fluent but more violent” (Nicols 116) since the anger against the imperial power seems to be more profound (ibid.). The British colonisers on the other hand wouldn’t face this strong resistance due to their different colonising practices (see Nicols 117f). The stronger presence of British powers in West African countries contributed, however, to a more deeply rooted literary tradition. Nicols names “Ignatius Sancho in England and Phyllis Wheatley in America [as] outstanding examples of West Africans who were known in their day for their poetry” (Nicols 117). Introducing the reader now to three widely mentioned representatives of British black poets, shows the difficulty of finding non-Caribbean representatives who are either born in Britain or stayed there after their arrival.

3.3.1.2.1 James Berry

The Guardian described James Berry and his poems after his passing in June 2017 as

one of the best loved and most taught poets in Britain, a great champion of Caribbean culture, an influential anthologist and a determined though unsentimental advocate of friendship between races. His poems ranged from the lyrical to the caustic, but almost all of them intimately caught the speech patterns of his native Jamaica. (Niven)

He is remembered as one of the most inspiring black British poets in contemporary literature for many reasons. The “love-hate relationship with his childhood home, along with the hope of a new life in a foreign, at times unforgiving, land” (Holmey) seems to determine and simultaneously encourage his creative outlet. When arriving in Britain with the first wave of West Indian immigrants in 1948 he has been noted mentioning “I knew I was right for London and London was right for me. London had books and accessible libraries” (qtd. in Thomas). To be able to take as many books from libraries as one liked, was a decisive point in his life. Since rural Jamaica provided very few opportunities for thirst of knowledge and Berry had to share his schoolbook with all his other siblings, he finally could study without limitations (ibid.). While working as a telegraphist, he took evening classes and worked on short stories, plays and publishing poetry (ibid.). Nevertheless, his process of integration into the British society does not appear as an easy one. Establishing a poetry performing troupe called the Bluefoot Travellers helped him in settling in and promoting black British voices. Calling themselves the negatively occupied Creole term for “outsider” automatically emphasised their position on the edge of society (see Holmey). In general, learning to fit in or becoming familiar with one’s

surrounding was characteristic for Berry's work and Holmeý states that "[m]uch of his poetry explored how to rebuild a sense of self and belonging in an at-first unfamiliar place".

In blending Jamaican dialect with the English language in his poems, he was the first who fought ages-old boundaries and traditions (see Lowe and Barrs 5). On the one hand, it signals his engagement in promoting black British writing (ibid.), on the other, his ceaseless efforts in combining his old life with the new, while at the same time including the experiences of so many other newcomers. As Lowe and Barrs further observe, Berry uses his poetry to digest his negative experiences with colonialism in Jamaica (see 5). In describing and reliving his disappointment about inequality between whites and blacks in Jamaica and seeing all his father's energy being drained away, the motivation to leave his home and find a better life developed steadily (ibid.). "Migration did indeed offer Berry a different path from his father's and those who remained in Jamaica, but in his poetry it is also cause of rupture and heartache", notice Lowe and Barrs (5).

Comparing this with other writers of migration background, it seems to be characteristic of many poets to reflect on their "loss and nostalgia" (ibid.). But in Berry's poems, the "anger at the effects of colonialism and the legacy of slavery" (ibid.) unfolds specifically poignant. Another aspect linked with Berry's poetry is its sensibility for the politics of a 1970s Great Britain (see Neumann 66f). As it was mentioned above, his poems dealt also with racism as "a response to the growing resentments against immigrants and the humiliations of evermore restrictive immigration laws" (Neumann 67). Berry's way of shedding light on the challenges and opportunities experienced by the newcomers provides the Caribbean Creole with new power. Making extensive use of Caribbean Creole, he "contributed to asserting the validity of nation language and to renegotiating 'language prestige'" (Neumann 60). However, playfully shifting from standard English to Caribbean Creole also pronounces a sense of belonging to this diverse society and "permit[s] new speaking positions" (Neumann 67). The in-betweeness also reflected by the interplay of Caribbean Creole and standard English, nevertheless, allows celebrating and following highly complex processes of the development of a new cultural diversity (ibid.). What Berry discovered and was able to express through poetry, had great impact on the British literature. Therefore, his love for poetry and literature eventually made him a winner of the National Poetry Competition in 1981 and being awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 1990. Berry's exceptional skill, weaving new patterns with language and exploring realities with words, will be illustrated now with presenting stanzas from his poem "Outsider":

If you see me lost on busy streets,
 my dazzle is sun-stain of skin,
 I'm not naked with dark glasses on
 saying barren ground has no oasis:
 it's that cracked up by extremes
 I must hold self
 together with extreme pride.
 [...]

If you see me lost in my sparse
 room, I don't ruminate
 on prisoners and falsify
 their jokes, and go on about
 prisons having been perfected
 like a common smokescreen of mind:
 it's that I moved
 my circle from ruins

and I search to remake it whole.

3.3.1.2.2 John Agard

Born in British Guiana in 1949 and influenced by the British curricula with Chaucer and Shakespeare, fairy tales and Enid Blyton, the fascination with the Motherland seems to be established early in John Agard's life (see Capon). Also, his affinity for words could be traced back to his early childhood, when he imitated famous cricket commentators (ibid.). Moving to Great Britain in 1977 together with his wife, Grace Nichols, he started working as a touring lecturer for the Commonwealth Institute (see British Council 2018). In that position, he visited schools and held workshops to introduce young and old to Caribbean Culture (ibid.). However, playing and experimenting with words has been his true passion and he is "grateful for the blessing of poems still coming" (Capon). Agard's poetry skilfully incorporates orality and poems "[emerge] out of a particular understanding of the relationship between poet and audience" (Gilmour 344). By combining Jamaican Creole with standard English, his poems gain multiple layers so that

[p]oetry here, in the hands of the "poetsonian", becomes a craft that can travel between languages and art forms; cross the ocean between the Caribbean, the US, and Britain; navigate between sound and form; draw poet and audience together; and carry out offshore raids on prose. (ibid.)

Agard's poetry is further described as "typically energetic" (British Council 2018) with a "flamboyant and inimitable performance style" that is "hugely popular among schoolchildren from across the country" (ibid.). This supported his ambitions in making the Caribbean Culture

more visible in Great Britain as well as contributed to promote equality among human beings. Agard is very well aware of prejudices and racial injustice around the world, although he has never experienced it openly himself (see Capon). However, he observes that “Western education is entrenched with preconceived notions of other societies” (ibid.), which makes it difficult to form unbiased ideas about foreign cultures. In this context, Agard’s poems provide readers of different backgrounds, age or race, a platform for finding new identities, forming their own and learn to question prevailing notions. One of Agard’s most famous poems, *Listen Mr Oxford Don*, is considered “the acme of a particular kind of black British voice poetry that plays off the friction between writing and speech, its irreverent and comic dramatization of voice intervening in and disrupting the dominant linguistic order” (Gilmour 344). It was part of a movement that had great effects on British literature and future perceptions. Fellow poets like Fred d’Aguiar or Grace Nichols belonged to the league of writers “whose poetry works to challenge monolithic notions of British culture, language, and national belonging” (Gilmour 345). Language – vernaculars and Creole in particular – became an instrument to rebel against society’s norms, to challenge people’s minds and to fight for “individual and collective self-determination” (ibid.). Therefore, Agard uses poetry and humour to make children and adults think deeply about challenging things or reflect on identification and to lend usually voiceless characters a voice (Capon). His last award, the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2012, certainly mirrors his abilities correctly and praises “an important and – at his best – uniquely inventive talent; ‘rich in literary and cultural allusion’, as Helen Dunmore has commented of his work, ‘yet as direct as a voice in the bus queue’” (British Council 2018).

Listen Mr Oxford Don

Me not no Oxford don
me a simple immigrant
from Clapham Common
I didn’t graduate
I immigrate

But listen Mr Oxford don
I’m a man on de run
and a man on de run
is a dangerous one

I ent have no gun
I ent have no knife

But mugging de Queen's English
Is the story of my life

[...]

3.3.1.2.3 Benjamin Zephaniah

Some would describe Zephaniah as “the people’s poet” (Procter 2010), who found his way into literature via unusual paths. Probably most stunning is the fact that he made it to the top of British non-white writers known across the whole country despite his dyslexia. His dyslexia was also the reason why he left school at only 13, barely able to write and read (Benjamin Zephaniah 2018) and thereafter experienced many ups and downs. As a “black British Brummie” (ibid.), who moved with his family during his childhood from Jamaica to Handsworth/Birmingham, he was member of street gangs, saw friends die due to drugs or rivalries and eventually he went to prison “mainly for stealing” (Barber, Moss). This seemed to mark a new start in his life and after he finished his sentence, he moved to London in 1979 (see Procter 2010). Although he loved Handsworth, which he named “the Jamaican capital of Europe”, his aim was to break out of this black in black society (Benjamin Zephaniah 2018). Soon after his arrival in London he was able to publish his first collection of poems in 1980 with a publishing cooperative with the aim to reach out to “a wider mainstream audience” (ibid.). Having always sensed a strong connection to poetry and producing lyric since his early childhood, Zephaniah is reported to have won the hearts of his home community by the age of 15 (ibid.). His poetry

is blessed with a verbal musicality inspired by his Caribbean heritage. His work addresses global issues such as racism, animal cruelty and the need for greater social justice, shot through with a rich humour, drawing on rap and dub rhythms, that make his poetry accessible to children and perennially popular in schools. (BBC 2014)

Does it surprise then that he “was voted Britain's third favourite poet of all time (after T.S. Eliot and John Donne) in a BBC poll in 2009” (Bloodaxe Books 2018)? Zephaniah's work seems very timely and accessible to a very wide audience through its rhythms and funny wordplays. His relationship with children seems to be unique in the way that children trust him (Barber), share their poems with him and can easily understand his texts. Readers of his novels think of his style of writing as being “very frank, and to the point, which may sound a bit boring, yet actually reveals a lot about the character and the situation he is in” (KhadijaH10). Moreover, Zephaniah actively engages with children during readings and workshops, talks with them on the streets and feels drawn to them through their genuine interest in their surroundings (Benjamin Zephaniah 2018, Barber). Another reason for his popularity among children might be his love for and drive to

compose poems or songs despite his severe dyslexia. He would think of a line or hear a phrase that inspires him and would immediately start composing and memorising a new text (Barber). He seems to serve as an inspiring role model who can directly relate to children's dreams and worries and encourage them to use their powers to start a process of creation.

Zephaniah's drive to explore his environment reconnects him to his inner child, lets him climb trees and feel an unrestricted freedom (ibid.). At the same time, Zephaniah describes himself as still feeling angry at the political system, which doesn't act according to the real needs of the people, and being in a revolutionary mode (see Moss). His dismissive stance on the politics of his time and country was famously made clear when he rejected an OBE in 2003. Zephaniah was quite surprised, when he was offered this award despite his open critique on a still prevailing Empire (Zephaniah 2003). Music and poetry are instruments for him to stay in tune with reality and interact with others, so they also keep involved with everything around them. Moreover, poetry is at his heart since he was a young child. Zephaniah's development from the floors of rap discos to the rank of Britain's most read poets can be seen as the outcome of his love and disciplined work. One example of his outstanding work is now included here:

Who's Who

I used to think nurses Were women,
I used to think police
Were men,
I used to think poets
Were boring,
Until I became one of them.

3.4 Summary: influence of the Canon

This chapter has demonstrated that the Canon plays a significant role in shaping the body of literature, a nation's identity and society overall. The way in which literature is selected and promoted as a standard to strive for, uphold and look at the world, impacts whether ways of perceiving, thinking and being are being reified or conversely changed. It is clear that being represented in the Canon promotes and secures visibility. Poets or writers in general whose works are listed in well-known anthologies naturally have a greater chance to be recognised by a wide-ranging audience than those who aren't mentioned. The selection of certain poets or styles can also have the impact of shaping the selection of future poets or authors.

In relation to the connection between black British poetry it is clear that there is an issue of representation: black British poets have not been represented in the Canon to a large degree and further, the actors which shape the content of the Canon (e.g. authorities, publishers and educational institutions) also suffer from a representation problem and/or are being influenced in their choice of selection by questionable rationales or motives. Additionally, the existing structures do not seem to promote diversity or include much self-reflection. Through the black British poetry which has been included into the Canon, as well as the poetry that has been overlooked or omitted, the Canon has defined, propelled yet simultaneously restricted the meaning and content of black British poetry. The overview and analyses of black British poets included in the canon demonstrate that the themes that have been reoccurringly promoted in canonisation are: struggles with fitting in and being considered an outsider. The inclusion of these poets, however, have had an influence on the perspective of the audience at large in so far that they were not only presented with poems about preconceptions on black lives, but also with issues of finding one's identity in general.

4. Current trends in black British poetry and their influence

The presence and rising recognition of black British poets as well as their well-received art signal an important change within British literature. Moving to the final element of black British poetry that this thesis analyses, this section looks at the current trends of Black British Poetry. It explores the challenges addressed by the new generation of black British poets including; challenges to gain recognition, stigma associated with the expression of black British poetry as well as bridging the divide between written and spoken poetry. It then explores the new voices of black British poetry and their influence.

4.1 Overcoming challenges for true recognition

Reviewing the previous chapter shows the progress in terms of the heightened attention paid to black British poets that has occurred. Nevertheless, it was also pointed out how challenging their working environment can be and how much effort they often need to find decent publishers. Another issue black British artists try to address and to resolve can be named as a stigma associated with black British poetry and its connection to street culture, lingering since their ancestors' settlement in Britain. The stigma could have originated from their past, when black people were denied access to cultural spaces and instead met in front of their houses after work to spend their evenings together, singing songs and playing music. From this habit, new styles of music or dance were established and found their way into the wider public, where from

it found both admiration and disapproval from white people. This ambivalent relationship with street culture is still widespread.

Wood observes that “[s]treet culture’ has become shorthand for an urban, black or black influenced culture – raw, uncompromising and ‘authentic’” (105). Many young artists of any colour make use of this style and imitate or adopt certain behaviour for their purposes without claiming reference to blackness, which shows how deeply integrated this kind of culture is in British youth (ibid.). Woods points also out that “the terms ‘urban’ and ‘street’ are complex ones, often presented as simplistic shorthand for a ‘black’ culture that is debased, commercialized, unrealistic and compromised of themes and tropes, offering little more than a mythical, exaggerated view of life” (ibid.). Furthermore, Wood refers to the term’s past and mentions its relevance in the 1970s and 1980s as “a site for challenge, occupation and even celebration” as well as “dynamic sites for the development, negotiation and contestation of a sense of black Britishness in the face of an often hostile reception from white Britons” (ibid.).

It seems that the blacks’ active display of otherness and promotion of diversity challenged many white people in their accustomed behaviour and reminded white Britons of the many prejudices which people of colour are confronted with on a daily basis. However, by applying this ‘black style’ for themselves, the underlying idea of blacks to illustrate resistance against white hegemony turns the original style of ‘urban’ and ‘street’ into “a debased, homogenous style devoid of any political or social engagement” (Wood 106). This understanding is also transferred to black cultural styles, whereas black music is often labelled as urban (ibid.). Additional confusion is created when black British street culture is not differentiated from the African-American aesthetic due to their different histories and development (see Wood 106f). To emphasise their contrast and independence, some critics highlight the importance of keeping black British and Afro-American cultural processes apart without considering the historical interdependence of their African or Jamaican ancestors (see Wood 107). By regarding these close ties which define non-white immigrants until today, one can probably agree that many influences still pervade the cultural production of blacks in Britain and America – and will continue to do so. Nevertheless, from reflecting on the importance of the so-called street culture for the creation of a black British literature, one can still grasp the impact of the negative notions white Britons have cultivated over time.

In addition to this prejudiced approach to black British poetry, a remaining struggle is the against the prominent view that poetry is either written or spoken. The combination of writing poetry to be published and at the same time composing texts to be performed at readings or jams leaves many scholars puzzled. Many struggle to analyse poetry which is meant to be both

on page and stage. In addition, as this issue was explored a little in the above section about influential writers of the past and present, it became apparent that many writers had difficulties to be published due to the orality of their texts (see Fowler 177). Despite the great history of oral poetry throughout ages and continents, it seems to be a novelty to explicitly compose poetry for the eyes and the ears. The challenges are probably caused by the need to ask specific questions for each medium and focus on different nuances as well as “points to a long-running, unresolved argument in Britain about what poetry is and who it is for” (ibid.). Another aspect vital to be regarded here as well, is mentioned by Fowler who observed that many poets who are listed in the category of spoken word and named as ‘performance poet’ or ‘spoken word artist’ feel these terms are “reductionist” (ibid.). They argue that these terms are separating them from the written texts and concentrate too much on the event of performance, while leaving out the creative process of composing meaningful text. To bring poetry to the masses and include a new audience other than that of university settings, rebellious poets organised readings in open spaces like town halls or pubs during the British poetry revival of the 1960s (see Fowler 178f). They argued that “poetry is a public phenomenon” which rests on the shoulders of the exchange between the writer and listeners to develop its deeper meaning (see Fowler 179).

Considering that a long-lasting legacy might only be secured when poets find respected publishers who put the oral version down to written text, which can be studied and analysed in academic settings, shows however, the fragility of poetic production (see Fowler 181f). The frailty of spoken words has been known since language is being studied and has been confronted by putting it down on paper. Nevertheless, many poets believe in the transforming power of recited poems which only then can transport their deeper meaning to the receiver. This is especially the case with black British poems composed along specific rhythms unfamiliar for many listeners or readers who would remember the poem’s intended musical structure after hearing it during a public reading to receive the same feeling at home. For scholars is this combination of performance, spoken word and written text a challenge to study, wherefore this cultural production probably still lacks its broad public recognition (see Novak 15). Struggling with its yet unwritten history, scholars would need first to review the poetry’s political and social past to prepare the grounds for the deeper analysis of live performance poetry (see Novak 15f).

The lack of consideration of live poetry events due to a range of prejudices effects a whole category which draws its energies from poetry readings. Regarding poetry readings for example as mere tactic for commercial distribution of one’s publications does not pay the due respect to this energetic movement which started decades ago (see Novak 17). Therefore, literature studies, solely focussing on the written text, because “the live performance of poetry apparently

has little to do with ‘poetry itself,’ which is obviously envisioned as writing” (Novak 19), do not elaborate on the performative forms of poetry (Novak 17). Since theatre studies “[represent] a continuous move away from the authority of the written text towards the live performance on stage as its primary concern and the acknowledgement of theatre’s essential plurimediality” (ibid.), the missing involvement from both related fields of study would explain the scholarly ignorance towards live performances of poetry. To eventually generate more academic interest in performance poetry, Novak argues “[a]n awareness of the evaluative force of the concepts of orality and literacy and of live poetry’s position in this discursive field is thus crucial” and would support “deciding on a methodological approach for its study” (19).

As was briefly mentioned above “many poets regard live performance as a generic aspect of the poet’s trade and effective communication with their audience as an important dimension of poetry itself rather than merely an economic necessity” (Novak 22). Furthermore, “[p]oetic composition is an integrated process and many written poems exist in several versions, meaning that any manifestation of a poem ought to be regarded as a ‘version’ in the absence of a stable original” (ibid.). And yet, since the establishment of signs for our language systems it has come to be regarded as inferior to only be able to speak rather to express one’s thoughts also in writing. The more elaborate written texts are composed the more recognition and appreciation from others are provided (see Novak 23f). As it could be noticed from the above considerations, this notion especially finds articulation within black British poetry, when poets present their poems on stages with elements of performance. Some critics, including poets themselves, are disturbed by this excitement about an oral presentation, believing that the true ability of the writer hides on the page (see Novak 26f). Being considered as a primitive artistic expression, orality in poetry is also believed to destroy the poetic style (see Novak 27), without regard that all the written, playful patterns developed through spoken language (ibid.). The culture behind the evolution of poetic language can probably be traced in every community of the world and countless examples of public recitations from ancient times until nowadays show how vital spoken word seems to be for the development of arts and education of people (see Novak 24). Nevertheless, it appears to be of importance to be able to distinguish the various forms of oral presentations of poetry. Some poets prefer more subtle forms of public poetry readings to inspire their audience by their mere voice and word rhythms to settings where poets perform their poetry including theatrical elements. These differences might also help to create a better understanding of oral poetry performance and to reduce generalisations about public readings with encounters with an audience (see Novak 29f). Altogether, it can be noted that “[w]hat emerges quite clearly from these difficulties of defining performance poetry, however, is the

discomfort the term causes when it is read as a prioritisation of orality over the written word” (Novak 32). Applying these observations to the situation of black British poets today, it could have significant effect on their overall perception they are confronted by the public and scholarly interest. Eventually, scholarly involvement would be established and thus, propel the further expansion of this spirited category.

4.2 Influential current black British Poets

Exploring the new generation of promising writers, one stumbles across a rather recent phenomenon of making one’s poetry public. At the same time this trend fits nicely in with recent times’ habits and customs of young people in general.. Since the use of social media such as Instagram or Twitter has found great resonance with young people, many writers use this medium as their first outlet. With rising popularity of this recent publishing method, a new term has already been coined: “Instagram poet” (see Rumble, Bausells). This term does neither imply nor assume how seriously the poet is treating their passion, many might begin sharing their poems with the sole intention of getting feedback from others. The publication process seems moreover interesting to investigate regarding composing the setting, font type and size or whether it’s a response to a specific event. All these factors might have effect on the range of distribution and how readers are reached. The more ‘likes’ or ‘shares’ a poem receives, the more likely it is for the poet to get far-reaching attention. For some poets like Yrsa Daley-Ward this expansion eventually invites the recognition of publishers who notice the potential and print the poet’s work on paper. This enables the poet to build up a new readership, who relies more on the printed word, and to strengthen the bonds with the old by signalling one’s commitment to poetry. Although Instagram might have been used at first, it becomes apparent that printed editions are still the preferred medium for poems. This behaviour also demonstrates the manifold approaches individual poets take to publish their work. Moreover, these developments are probably telling for their times where more and more new patterns for sharing culture evolve and existing paths are exchanged for new ones. Many critics might comment negatively on these practices and express doubt over the quality of the texts, since new media is often perceived to mainly feed the lower instincts and provide quick gratification. However, if someone wants to find out whether young people are interested in poetry, social media can serve as a means to illustrate the reputation openly shared poems receive (Okeowo 2015). Some of the poets active on social media might prefer this kind of publication to alternative ways of bringing their poems to the public. The rise in interest for poetry slams or other poetry performances suggests that not only more people produce poetry, but also that there is an audience waiting for lyrical input. In the following sections I want to introduce the reader to

some acknowledged young black British writers who seem to have continuous influence on the next period of writing and are diligently working on producing a new body of poetry.

4.2.1 Warsan Shire

Born in 1988 in Kenya to Somali parents who later emigrated to the UK with their children (Okeowo 2015), Warsan Shire has been raised into a multicultural community and a quickly changing society. Her poetry vividly reflects these experiences so that her writing “feels confiding, occasionally brutal, but somehow still playful” (ibid.). Moreover, the presence of her texts develops an intensity that effects the reader’s emotions sustainably. Her writing is described as “East African storytelling and coming-of-age memoir fused into one”, created by “a first-generation woman always looking backward and forward at the same time, acknowledging that to move through life without being haunted by the past lives of your forebears is impossible” (ibid.). Shire is one example for the present-day newcomers who struggle with the new life and expectations from outside. Having felt like an outsider in the vibrating community of London, Shire

embodies the kind of shape-shifting, culture-juggling spirit lurking in most people who can’t trace their ancestors to their country’s founding fathers, or whose ancestors look nothing like those fathers. In that limbo, [she] conjures up a new language for belonging and displacement. (ibid.)

For this integration of the Old and the New, she draws inspiration not only from her own observations, but also from stories recorded from family and friends. Shire’s aim, to tell the untold or inaccurately told stories about ordinary people, has led her to give a voice especially to immigrants and refugees (see Okeowo 2015, Poetry Foundation 2018). Elaborating on someone’s motivations to leave their country behind in lyrical style made her not only popular among refugees and their advocates, but also known to the wider society. Her famous poem *Home* was extensively used to draw attention to the difficulties faced by people fleeing their homes and many lines were separately recited to illustrate their hardships (see Bausells and Shearlaw 2015, Zakaria 2016). Being awarded with the Brunel University African Poetry Prize in 2013 (Carolyn 2013), is a sign that Shire was already in the focus of well-known readers such as Bernardine Evaristo or Kwame Dawes – additionally, to the many followers on Twitter and Tumblr (see Okeowo 2015, Hess 2016). Soon after, she was also awarded as the ever first Young Poet Laureate for London by Carol Ann Duffy, which gave another boost to her career (BBC News 2013).

However, her publishing debut was in 2011, when she published her first poetry pamphlet *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, a “collection of poems that was outsize in its

sensuality, wit, and grief” (Okeowo 2015). Shire’s poems gained further acknowledgment, when they were printed in *Wasafiri*, *Magma* and *Poetry Review* and in the *Salt Book of Younger Poets* (see the Brunel University African Poetry Prize). Another significant turn in her career and what might be indicative for this age and its new ways of catching readers’ interest, was brought about by the inclusion of Shire’s poems into the visual album by Beyoncé. In this album the world-famous pop singer reads passages of selected poems by Shire and tightly connects her songs to the lyrical texts. Since Beyoncé’s album was themed around prominent black and female issues, such as injustice or inequality, it seemed to be a good choice to select Shire’s poems about the challenges for (immigrant) women finding their places in new societies (see Zakaria 2016). Both music and poems resonated greatly with audiences around the world and triggered a considerable rise of attention by whites and blacks for the young poet (see King 2016). Although this collaboration with the pop star propelled Shire’s recognition around the world in very diverse settings, Shire appeared to be treating this project not more or less diligently than her others (see Hess 2016). Her love for poetry, her characteristic style, addressing issues ranging from displacement, persecution and female, Muslim sexuality from an insider perspective as “the migrant talking back” (Zakaria 2016), motivate colleagues to say that writing “‘is what she’ll be doing into her 90s.” (Hess 2016).

4.2.2 Yrsa Daley-Ward

Who would expect a model to write poems touching people so deeply that she is able to publish them and become famous? Yrsa Daley-Ward’s story to become an acknowledged present-day writer is another uncommon one with regard to the lives other respectable poets have chosen. Daley-Ward’s epiphany-like decision to focus her energies on writing poems begins in a time, when she faced depression and was putting great efforts into a modelling career in South Africa (Rumble 2018). She is reported to have written poetry since her childhood, even submitting her poems to publishers who, however, always rejected her (ibid.). Daley-Ward’s return to her lyrical self-realisation was initiated by a spoken-word performance on family discord, where she performed a poem, which she composed only for this event (ibid.). She continued to write poems and eventually self-published her first poetry collection using Amazon, which found an excited readership (ibid.). These readers were partly familiar with her work by following her on Instagram, where she started sharing her texts with a growing number of fans (see Abdurraqib 2017, Barlow 2017, Rumble 2018). Some might use the term ‘Instagram poet’ in this context, because the social media platform was used to get in reach with readers (see Bausells 2017). Nevertheless, the contemptuous way to describe such kind of poets, disregards the fact that they were clever enough to use this platform and benefit from it (see Abdurraqib 2017). It might be similar to the actual performance scene, where poet and audience are in direct

contact with each other and can feel the emotional connection. On Instagram, followers are able to directly respond to a poem and share their feelings and thoughts, so that the poet immediately receives critique and feedback (see Rumble 2018). Thus, it creates an intimacy between the reader and the writer which is hardly comparable to alternative ways of sharing one's work. Nonetheless, Daley-Ward is also reciting her poems in readings and spoken-word performances together with the British Council and has organised exhibitions of her work at the Tate Modern, Apples and Snakes and Film Poem (see The British Blacklist). Working as a model and turning into a poet, certainly shifts the popular imagery of previous perceptions concerning poetry. The essence of producing works of art, however, reconnects with long standing traditions. In this respect, Daley-Ward's poetry is described as "short capsules of emotion – gut-wrenching, laugh-out-loud funny and tear-inducing" (Bausells 2017) or "aching and touchable work that illuminates life's interior emotional movements with nuance and long-lingering imagery" (Abdurraqib 2017). Critics could argue that the present age is often controlled by emotions which govern rational behaviour and make it difficult to distinguish between exceptional and lasting quality or literature, which is easy to consume, but also easy to forget. Daley-Ward's poems are considered as "powerful streams of feeling but also perfect for the re-posting age. If you're on Instagram, you probably have seen some of her verses posted by someone else, in inspiration or awe, framed by a symmetric white square." (Bausells 2017). In this habit of reading superficially and quickly scanning information, people tend to put value on things, which seem to match a specific situation without reflecting on its deeper meaning or the impact an utterance could imply. When readers on social media platforms come across a line they like and appreciate in that moment, they often do not question the content or the background. However, if one does, one might discover a truer picture of what has been represented. In the case of Daley-Ward's poetry, the essayist Kiese Laymon takes a stance and argues that "[p]oetry isn't always easily punctured, or made sense of, and there is a particular beauty to the moments when it can be" (qtd. in Abdurraqib 2017). Following Daley-Ward's writing, then, might entail this moment, where the reader feels connected and poetry has achieved its aim. On the other hand, showing more perseverance and the reader will develop another understanding of what has been written. Laymon "praises Daley-Ward in turn for knowing how to give poetry – and in the process, herself – to the reader" (ibid.). This might be the reason for many readers to follow her poetry, to gain insights for their own lives by feeling related with her experiences. Concerning the appearance of Daley-Ward in media, it came to my attention that her coverage often includes a detailed report about her life and sexual preferences. In comparison with other newcomer poets, where the focus is more on their writing and achievements in poetry, Daley-Ward is rather presented as an outsider, using unusual methods to attract her readership. On the

other hand, poets like Warsan Shire have chosen the more common paths to receive recognition, probably due to their educational process. Nevertheless, Daley-Ward can be championed for her natural and unpretentious way to address human relationships, but also for rebelling against all odds and “buil[ding] a platform for literature out of social media” (Barlow 2017).

4.2.3 Kayo Chingonyi

When he was six years old, Kayo Chingonyi came with his parents from Zambia to the UK (see The Poetry Society 2018). In an interview for the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), he recalls that his inspiration to write, stems from watching cartoons and reading stories, which nurtured the ambition “to create imaginative worlds of my own” (Caspari 2016). After winning the Poetry Society’s Rise Youth Slam Championship in 2003 Chingonyi remembers his raising involvement with London’s poetry scene and his changing understanding of poetry and performance (ibid.). He is now considered a skilled poet and performer, one, who mesmerises his audience through his melodic voice and recites “poems with an immediacy that gives each one to you like a present” (Kellaway 2017). Chingonyi’s work not only concentrates on producing poetry, but also operating as an emcee, producer, and DJ including collaborations with musicians and composers (see Kayo Chingonyi Bio). Moreover, he is active in radio broadcasting and sometimes editing magazines (ibid.). In readings and performances all around the world listeners can experience Chingonyi bringing sound and print together and feel the influence of performed poems (see Caspari 2016, Kayo Chingonyi Bio). Perceiving the poem not solely as a written text on page, Chingonyi advocates for being poetry a complementary experience of sound and text. He remembers being “most moved by poems at the level of sound first before looking at their propositional content” and identifies “this interplay between speaking and writing [...] at the heart of what [he does]” (Caspari 2016). Sampling, as it is often practiced in producing new music, is also characteristic for Chingonyi’s work, who describes this practice coming from an unconscious use of lyrics or phrases from other people in his daily life; if he stopped including them, his poems would lose their personal touch (ibid.). Chingonyi is also described as “[a] writer of power and precision, as striking on the page as he is on the stage” who “eloquently confronts issues of race, self-portraiture and self-perception to shine a light on all that is dark, hidden, ‘smuggled from polite conversation’” (The Poetry Book Society 2018). His debut collection *Kumukanda*, published in 2017 and named after the Zambian initiation rites to become a man, was highly praised. Critics describe it with “being about memory and identity in the best and broadest sense. But it also challenges our preconceptions around culture as it is both made and received, and the tensions between art and the self” (Wilkinson 2017). Others are reminded of the themes of “exile, migration, masculinity and hip-hop, all in Kayo's inimitable passion and style” (The Poetry Book Society 2018). Also,

Chingonyi's colleague, Warsan Shire, shares this perception and the praise, calling the collection a "brilliant debut – a tender, nostalgic and at times darkly hilarious exploration of black boyhood, masculinity and grief" (see Haith 2017). It is not surprising that Chingonyi elaborates on the themes of disconnection or displacement in his poems, when one considers his history. His own deliberations give insight to his ambivalent feelings and illustrate the eloquence, he makes use of in his poetry:

The feeling of disconnection is how I exist in the world as someone who both is and is not British. To be both British and Zambian is to be neither one or the other. It is a hybrid way of being that means I can't be accepted by either 'side'. In the space of the poem, though, I can be both. I can write in English about my Luvale heritage. I can incorporate phrases from Bemba and Luvale making a new English to add to the various Englishes that already exist. This notion of the poem as a space in which I can exist in my fullness is probably why I have chosen poetry as my medium. What is a poem but a record of something the poet cannot get past? (Prac Crit)

When he is asked about identification and being labelled by others, Chingonyi explains his stance on this historically laden topic, claiming that

[l]anguage is such an important part of how we are identified from without and our understanding of race is part of that vast system. I do engage with a lot of writing concerning race in my work because there is still a lot to be done, in this country particularly, so that the subtle means by which structural racism persists are made manifest. I don't think it's necessarily the job of the poet to do this but it is certainly part of why I write poems, to chip away at the notion that whiteness is the normative unmediated position from which all other subjectivities deviate. (Caspari 2016)

These thoughtful deliberations point towards a promising future for the black British poetry community to be more and more recognised, where not only the online community, but also the older book reading audience is keen to read or hear more about.

4.2.4 Caleb Femi

Arriving as a child with his family in south-east London, growing up in a very diverse community around him and being more fascinated with the lyrics, than the songs themselves (see Alemoru 2017, Hernanz 2017), Caleb Femi seems to have a few things in common with the former introduced writer Kayo Chingonyi. After experiencing a heartbreak in his teens, Femi has turned to poetry to find solace, when he did not know how else to cope with his insecurity (see Fishwick 2017). The young poet recalls his difficulty to find a person to whom he could speak without fear or prejudice and successfully used poetry to come to terms with these experiences (ibid.). Although his motivation to compose poems has changed, writing about identity and masculinity is still at the heart of Femi's poems and a theme, thoroughly discussed especially for young readers and listeners (see Fishwick 2017). Having taught young

students according to the national curriculum, Femi has met many young boys and girls who struggle with popular stereotypes concerning femininity and masculinity. In order to assist them in finding their strengths and their individuality, Femi gives talks and readings as the current young people's laureate for London (ibid.). On several occasions he is able to discuss these issues, saying that

binary gender divisions such as black toys for boys and pink for girls are toxic. 'I don't see feminine as being the opposite of masculine,' [Femi] says. 'I see them co-existing in humanity. When you have these perceptions of men being on one polarised side and women being on the other, then what you are doing is separating the natural state of being a human.' (ibid.)

Moreover, he wants to motivate children and young people to perceive poetry as an opportunity to raise their voice and take ownership over their lives (see Hernanz 2017, Fishwick 2017). It is this context, where he encourages young writers to challenge the publishing industry, to take alternative routes and make use of technology, to demonstrate independence and strength (see Fishwick 2017). As a young people's poet laureate he is also eager to paint a new picture about poetry and feels a responsibility to engage young people in a meaningful exchange about the inspiring power of poems (see Flood 2016). Although many young people are interested in music, not everyone is talented to pursue their musical interest. So, Femi claims that "poetry can help them find that they have talent, that they might be talented with words but not necessary with music. Young people might find in poetry a viable art form for them to express themselves" (qtd. in Hernanz 2017). Having experienced a curiosity about poetry in many students during his time as a teacher, he sees great potential in encouraging young people to read or write poetry (see The Irish News 2018). Many teachers would notice this interest as well and try to create spaces for deeper conversations about poetry, however, felt too limited in their possibilities due to the strict curricula (ibid.). Looking back at his activity as a young people's laureate, Femi observes that although he couldn't fully achieve his aim to make poetry more accessible for young working-class people, his steps were contributing to reaching that goal (ibid.). Since the establishment of the young people's laureate for London program it has been the ambition to work against the current development of young people losing interest in cultural activities (Flood 2016). Femi's successor will certainly support already set measures and work accordingly to the program's objectives.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has explored the development of black British poetry across the arc of its origins to its current trends looking at three important features related to each of its three developmental milestones. It asked how black British poetry developed with regard to the role of colonialism

in its origins, the role of the Canon for its recognition and current trends of innovation to overcome challenges. This exploration has demonstrated overall how vibrant and timely discussions on black British poetry can be. As the interest for this field of study seems to grow and more people turn to read poetry due to their exposure on social media, analyses about texts and writers will increase and also help defining this category.

The inquiries in the beginning of this thesis about how black Brits came to settle in Great Britain from former slave states, set the stage for a deeper analysis of how the British Isles slowly but surely transformed into a more diverse population. By forming separate communities with like-minded people at first, sharing similar experiences in their daily lives, black British citizens found ways to preserve cultural habits, brought with them from their former lives, and to incorporate them in their new life situations. Moreover, their shared troubles about lack of freedom or education found multiple listeners when they incorporated these topics into poetry.

On the other hand, however, these first well-known records point not only at the difficulties inflicted upon black British people through colonialism, but also to the possibilities they encountered living in the Motherland. This steadily developing literary outlet was greatly propelled by the arrival of migrants from the Caribbean Islands, who were invited by the British government to support the country in the troubled times after WWII. The analysis of different reports and memoirs showed that many people came with great expectations and through willpower and commitment to their intention of contributing to the advancement of British society eventually succeeded in accomplishing their aims despite all obstacles. For many black British poets who rose to fame, it seemed to be key during these times to fully engage with poetry and to voice their thoughts about injustice, social separation or displacement among other issues. After the political insecurities of their times, writing poetry was their means to achieve a betterment of their conditions. As the reader could explore, their manifold literary production has also channelled ongoing discussions about the labelling of this category, which is now best known as black British writing after wandering between the terms post colonial and Commonwealth literature.

Moving towards an analysis of the structures of the British Canon, it has been illustrated that a construct such as a literary canon holds great power and supports building the identity of a nation. After investigating the canon's background concerning its meaning and origin, the analysis went on to shed more light on the agents involved in establishing such an important structure for upholding literary standards. As their reasons and motives might seem irrational or arbitrary, these agents' choices of texts and writers for inclusion to this exclusive selection stirs up discourses on power and representation. Especially in the case of black British poetry

the effects of this method of operating can be seen and therefore, needs to be questioned. As only few black British poets are represented, a rather incorrect and biased image is displayed regarding their highly diverse and rich productions. Thus, diversity of texts and viewpoints is limited, wherefore the society's perception of itself might also suffer. The implications of exclusion from such a decisive construct as the canon could have been discussed in more depth and would probably require an analysis of multiple factors. Among others, it would probably require an analysis of aspects concerning creative forces of literature and the formation of identity as an individual and a nation. However, to focus on this thesis' aims, this discussion was not deepened.

At the end of this thesis, we looked at concepts of black, street and urban which still dominate some discussions on the next generation of black British poets. These concepts are explored to find out how young people struggle to overcome the challenges they are facing right now. Since the former mentioned concepts dictate some decisions from publishers and critics, the younger generation of poets need again to fight back against these notions in order to move beyond presuppositions about their writing. Having already explored the importance of the connection between stage and page for some black British poets and how this relationship affects public recognition, the newcomers again employ new practices of sharing their works of art. Reflecting on their use of social media displays their engagement with poetry and their motivation to create new forms of sharing their writing. Although many critics or the public might be put off by such usage, turning to social media or self-publishing demonstrates the eagerness of these young poets. They not only find solace in writing for their own problems, rather they seem to be agents bringing about change for their peers and motivate a collective rethinking of the status quo. The examples for such writers introduced to the reader illustrate this new energetic movement and signal the vitality of black British poetry.

With the commitment to poetry of the new generation in mind and their methods of contributing to society, it can be inspiring for many up and coming writers and thinkers to also contribute to a steady development of poetry. Despite many difficulties – ranging from deprivation, manifold injustices and misrepresentations throughout history – black British poets seem to profit from their drive to give voice to the voiceless. Their continuous struggle stirs up ever-new energies to channel their creativity and find ways to reach a growing audience. This feature of black British poets also propels academic research to pay more attention to the category of black British poetry and investigate it with greater consciousness.

6. Bibliography

6.1 Printed Sources

- Arana, R. Victoria.** "Sea Change: Historicizing the Scholarly Study of Black British Writing." *Black British Writing*. Eds. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 19-45.
- Ashcroft, Bill, and Griffiths, Gareth, and Tiffin, Helen.** *The Empire Writes Back – Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Hall, Stuart.** "New Ethnicities." eds. Houston A. Jr. Baker and Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg. *Black British Cultural Studies – A Reader*. Chicago: UCP, 1996. 163-172.
- Brennan, Tim.** "Black British Writing". *The Literary Review*. (Fall 1990): 5-11
- Bryan, Judith.** "The Evolution of Black London." *Black British Writing*. Eds. Victoria R. Arana and Lauri Ramey. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 63-71.
- Childs, Peter, Weber, Jean Jacques, Williams, Patrick.** *Post-Colonial Theory and Literatures – African, Caribbean and South Asian* (ed. Ansgar Nünning). WVT-Handbücher zum Literaturwissenschaftlichen Studium. Band 7. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2006.
- Dabydeen, David and Wilson-Tagoe, Nana.** *A Reader's Guide to Westindian and Black British Literature*. 2nd ed. London: Hansib Educational Publications. 1997
- Donnell, Alison.** "Afterword: In Praise of a Black British Canon and the Possibilities of Representing the Nation 'Otherwise'." *A Black British Canon?* Eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 189-204.
- Doumerc, Eric.** "Benjamin Zephaniah, the Black British Griot." *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*. Ed. Kadija Sesay. Hertford: Hansib Publications Limited, 2005. 193-205.
- Edwards, Justin D.** *Postcolonial Literature*. (consultant editor: Nicolas Tredell) Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008
- Fowler, Corinne.** "The Poetics and Politics of Spoken Word Poetry." *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*. ed. Deirdre Osborne. Cambridge: CUP (2016). 177-192.
- George Sesay, Kadija.** "Transformations Within the Black British Novel." *Black British Writing*. Eds. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 99-108.
- Gilmour, Rachael.** "Doing voices: Reading language as craft in black British poetry". *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 49/3 (2014): 343–357.
- Hall, Stuart.** "The Work of Representation." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997. 13-74.
- Karlberg, Michael.** "The Power of Discourse And The Discourse of Power: Pursuing Peace Through Discourse Intervention." *International Journal of Peace Studies*. 10/1 (2005): 1-23.
- King, Bruce.** "Nationalism, Internationalism, Periodisation and Commonwealth Literature." *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature*. ed. Dieter Riemenschneider. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1983. 10-18.
- Lidchi, Henrietta.** "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997. 151-222.
- Lima, Maria Helena.** "The Politics of Teaching Black and British." *Black British Writing*. Eds. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 47-62.
- Low, Gail.** "'Shaping Connections': From West Indian to Black British." *A Black British Canon?* Eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 168-188.
- Lowe, Hannah; Barrs, Myra.** "James Berry at Ninety". *Wasafiri*. 30/1 (March 2015): 5-10.
- McIntosh, Malachi.** "Post-colonial Plurality in Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*. Cambridge: CUP, 2016. 193-207.

- McLeod, John.** "Some problems with "British" In a "Black British canon". *Wasafiri*. 17/36 (2002): 56-59.
- Nasta, Suheila.** "1940s-1970s." *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*. Ed. Deirdre Osborne. Cambridge: CUP, 2016. 23-39.
- Neumann, Birgit.** "Liberationist Political Poetics." *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*. Ed. Deirdre Osborne. Cambridge: CUP, 2016. 59-76.
- Newland, Courttia, and Sesay, Kadija.** Eds. *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*. London: Hamish Hamilton. 2000
- Novak, Julia.** *Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance*. Amsterdam: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011.
- Osborne, Deirdre.** "Introduction". *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*. Cambridge: CUP, 2016. 1-20.
- Prendergast, Thomas A.** "Canon Formation." *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*. ed. Marion Turner. 1st ed. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013. 239-251.
- Procter, James.** "General Introduction: '1948'/'1998': Periodising Postwar Black Britain." *Writing Black Britain 1948 – 1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. By Procter. Manchester: MUP, 2000. 1-12.
- Schäfer, Jürgen.** "Perspectives of Literary Historiography." *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature* (ed. Dieter Riemenschneider). Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1983. 3-9.
- Tiffin, Helen.** "Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgement." *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature* (ed. Dieter Riemenschneider). Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1983. 19-36.
- Wisker, Gina.** *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007
- Wood, Andy.** "'New Forms': Towards a Critical Dialogue with Black British 'Popular' Fictions." *A Black British Canon*. eds. Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006. 105-125.
- Zabus, Chantal.** "English Text Construction." *John Benjamins Publishing Company*. 1/2 (2008): 308–310.

6.2 Online Sources

- The Victorian Web.** Ed. George P. Landow. University Scholars Program U of Singapore, n.d. 20 November 2017. <http://www.victorianweb.org/>
- Abdurraqib, Hanif.** "Yrsa Daley-Ward's Powerful, Poetic Distillations." *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, 31 December 2017. 15 March 2018. <<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/12/yrda-daley-wards-powerful-poetic-distillations/549353/>>.
- Agbabi, Patience,** "The Wife of Bafa – Analysis." *British Council: Writers on Writing*. British Council, n.d. 11 December 2017. <<http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/writersonwriting/patienceagbabi/thewifeofbafa-analysis/index.html>>.
- Alemoru, Kemi.** "How Caleb Femi is making poetry relatable again." *Dazed*. Dazed Media, 28 September 2017. 23 March 2018. <<http://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/37588/1/how-caleb-femi-is-making-poetry-relatable-again>>.
- Alexander, Saffron.** "Windrush Generation: 'They thought we should be planting bananas'." *Telegraph Media Group Limited*, 22 June 2015. 8 June 2017. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/goodlife/11683233/Windrush-Generation-They-thought-we-should-be-planting-bananas.html>>.

- Barber, Lynn.** "The interview: Benjamin Zephaniah." *Poetry: The Observer*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 18 January 2009. 11 January 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jan/18/benjamin-zephaniah-interview-poet>>.
- Barlow, Eve.** "Yrsa Daley-Ward: 'People are afraid to tell the truth. But I don't care. It's boring otherwise'." *Fashion: The Observer*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 24 September 2017. 15 March 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/sep/24/yrda-daley-ward-bone-model-poet-feminist-lgbtq-activist>>.
- Bausells, Marta, Shearlaw, Maeve.** "Poets speak out for refugees: 'No one leaves home, unless home is the mouth of a shark'." *Books: Guardian Africa network*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 16 September 2015. 13 March 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/16/poets-speak-out-for-refugees->>.
- Bausells, Marta.** "Yrsa Daley-Ward on Self-Love, Short Attention Spans and Making Poetry Cool Again." *Elle: Hearst Magazines UK*, 12 October 2017. 27 February 2018. <<https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/culture/longform/a39275/instagram-poet-yrda-daley-ward-elle-interview/>>.
- BBC.** "Yorkshire clan linked to Africa." *News*. 24 January 2007. 10 May 2017. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6293333.stm>.
- . "Benjamin Zephaniah". *Poetry*. BBC, 2014. 12 January 2018. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/benjamin_zephaniah.shtml>.
- . "Historic Figures: Mary Seacole (1805 - 1881)." *History*. BBC, 2014. 29 May 2017. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/seacole_mary.shtml>.
- . "Warsan Shire announced as London's first young poet laureate." *News: UK London*. BBC, 3 October 2013. 13 March 2018. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-24375551>>.
- Benjamin Zephaniah.** "Me? I thought, OBE me? Up yours, I thought'." *Books*. Guardian News and Media Limited 27 November 2003, 15 January 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/nov/27/poetry.monarchy>>.
- Bloodaxe Books.** "Benjamin Zephaniah." *Authors*. Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2018. 12 January 2018. <<http://www.bloodaxebooks.com/ecs/category/benjamin-zephaniah>>.
- Capon, Felicity.** "John Agard: 'I feel an empathy with the bad characters'." *The Telegraph: Book News*. Telegraph Media Group Limited, 12 March 2013. 16 January 2018. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/9922672/John-Agard-I-feel-an-empathy-with-the-bad-characters.html>>.
- Carolyn.** "Warsan Shire Wins Brunel University African Poetry Prize 2013." *Books Live Sunday Times*. Tiso Blackstar Group, 30 April 2013. 13 March 2018. <<http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2013/04/30/warsan-shire-wins-brunel-university-african-poetry-prize-2013/>>.
- Caspari, Maya.** "Poetry and Performance: An Interview with Kayo Chingonyi." *ICA*. Institute for Contemporary Art, 15 February 2016. 20 March 2018. <<https://www.ica.art/bulletin/poetry-and-performance-interview-kayo-chingonyi>>.
- Fishwick, Samuel.** "Young Poet Laureate Caleb Femi: 'My generation has embraced technology - we're not waiting for publications anymore'." *Go London*. London Evening Standard, 24 January 2017. 23 March 2018. <<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/arts/young-poet-laureate-caleb-femi-my-generation-has-embraced-technology-were-not-waiting-for-a3448146.html>>.
- Haith, Chelsea.** "Kayo Chingonyi." *Postcolonial Writers Make Worlds*, 2017. 22 March 2018. <<https://writersmakeworlds.com/kayo-chingonyi/>>.
- Hernanz, Clara.** "Caleb Femi." *Wonderland: Art and Culture*. Wonderland Magazine, 28 September 2017. 23 March 2018. <<https://www.wonderlandmagazine.com/2017/09/28/caleb-femi/>>.
- Hess, Amanda.** "Warsan Shire, the Woman Who Gave Poetry to Beyoncé's 'Lemonade'." *Music*. The New York Times Company, 27 April 2016. 13 March 2018.

- <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/arts/music/warsan-shire-who-gave-poetry-to-beyonces-lemonade.html>>.
- Holmey, Oliver.** “James Berry: Jamaican-British poet who introduced Creole into the canon.” *Independent: Obituaries*. Independent Digital News & Media, 14 July 2017. 2 January 2018. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/james-berry-jamaican-british-poet-who-introduced-creole-into-the-canon-a7839536.html>>.
- Huntley, Graham.** “Centuries old Beachy Head Lady's face revealed.” *BBC News*. BBC, 1 February 2014. 10 May 2017. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-sussex-25962183>>.
- Kellaway, Kate.** “Kumukanda by Kayo Chingonyi review – a striking initiation.” *Poetry: Book of the day*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 1 August 2017. 20 March 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/01/kumukanda-by-kayo-chingonyi-review-poet>>.
- Kennedy, Maev.** “African origin of Roman York's rich lady with the ivory bangle.” *Archaeology*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 26 February 2010. 10 May 2017. <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2010/feb/26/roman-york-skeleton>>.
- KhadijaH10.** “Terror Kid by Benjamin Zephaniah – review.” *Children's Books*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 28 August 2014. 12 January 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/aug/28/review-benjamin-zephaniah-terror-kid>>.
- King, Jamilah.** “Here's the Warsan Shire Poem That Caught Beyoncé's Attention for 'Lemonade'.” *Mic*. Mic Network Inc., 25 April 2016. 14 March 2018. <<https://mic.com/articles/141711/here-s-the-warsan-shire-poem-that-caught-beyonc-s-attention-for-lemonade#.TGL8N2NUJ>>.
- Morris, Michael.** “Robert Wedderburn: race, religion and revolution.” *International Socialism*. Issue 132. International Socialism, 11 October 2011. 29 May 2017. <<http://isj.org.uk/robert-wedderburn-race-religion-and-revolution/>>.
- Niven, Alastair.** “James Berry obituary.” *Poetry*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 4 July 2017. 21 December 2017. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/04/james-berry-obituary>>.
- Official Website from Kayo Chingonyi.** “Kayo Chingonyi.” *Bio*. n.p. n.d., 20 March 2018. <<https://kayochingonyi.com/bio/>>.
- Okeowo, Alexis.** “The Writing Life of Warsan Shire, a Young, Prolific Poet.” *Cultural Comment*. Condé Nast, 21 October 2015. 12 March 2018. <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-writing-life-of-a-young-prolific-poet-warsan-shire>>.
- Peepal Tree Press.** “Una Marson: Selected Poems.” *Books*. Peepal Tree Press, n.d. 30 November 2017. <<http://www.peepaltreepress.com/books/una-marson-selected-poems>>.
- Phillips, Mike.** “Windrush - the Passengers.” *History: British History*. BBC, 10 March 2011. 8 June 2017. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/windrush_01.shtml>.
- Poetry Foundation.** “Warsan Shire.” *Poetry Foundation*. Poetry Foundation, n.d. 14 March 2018. <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/warsan-shire>>.
- Prac Crit.** “Kumukanda – Deep Note.” *Prac Crit*, August 2017. 22 March 2018. <<http://www.praccrit.com/essays/kumukanda-deep-note-by-kayo-chingonyi/>>.
- Procter, James.** “Benjamin Zephaniah.” *British Council: Literature*. British Council global, 2010. 11 January 2018. <<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/benjamin-zephaniah>>.
- . “Jean Binta Breeze.” *British Council: Literature*. British Council global, 2008. 14 December 2017. <<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/jean-binta-breeze>>.
- Roche, Barbara.** “Why are the British so reluctant to recognise our migration history?” *Migration: Opinion*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 10 May 2017. 10 May 2017. <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/10/british-migration-museum-history-immigration-minister>>.
- Rumble, Taylor-Dior.** “Yrsa Daley-Ward: The model who turned her pain into poetry.” *BBC News: Stories*. BBC, 7 January 2018. 15 March 2018. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/stories-41681507>>.

- Sandhu, Sukhdev.** "The First Black Britons." *History: British History*. BBC, 17 February 2011. 11 May 2017 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/black_britons_01.shtml>.
- Smith, Jules.** "Patience Agbabi." *British Council: Literature*. British Council global, 2003. 11 December 2017. <<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/patience-agbabi>>.
- Taukolonga, Sara.** "Making Poetry Seem Like a Breeze." *The Voice*. GV Media Group Ltd., 13 August 2011. 12 December 2017. <<http://www.voice-online.co.uk/article/making-poetry-seem-breeze>>.
- The British Blacklist.** "Yrsa Daley-Ward." *The British Blacklist*, n.d. 15 March 2018. <<http://www.thebritishblacklist.com/thebritishblacklist/yrsa-daley-ward/>>.
- The Brunel University African Poetry Prize.** "Warsan Shire." *Previous Winners: 2013*. Brunel University London, n.d. 14 March 2018. <<http://www.africanpoetryprize.org/2015-joint-winners>>.
- The Guardian.** "A timeline of Britain's EU membership in Guardian reporting." *Brexit*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 25 June 2017. 11 July 2017. <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/25/a-timeline-of-britains-eu-membership-in-guardian-reporting>>.
- . "West Indians arrive in Britain on board the Empire Windrush – archive, 1948." *Commonwealth immigration*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 23 June 2016. 8 June 2017. <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jun/23/immigration-windrush-west-indians-jamaica-britain>>.
- The Open University.** "Una Marson." *Making Britain*. The Open University, n.d. 28 November 2017. <<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/una-marson>>.
- The Poetry Archive.** "Patience Agbabi." *Poetry Archive*, 2005-2016. 11 December 2017. <<https://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/patience-agbabi>>.
- The Poetry Book Society.** "Kumukanda by Kayo Chingonyi." *Book*. The Poetry Book Society, n.d. 22 March 2018. <<https://www.poetrybooks.co.uk/products/kumukanda-by-kayo-chingonyi>>.
- The Poetry Society.** "Kayo Chingonyi." *Poems: Poets*. The Poetry Society and respective creators, n.d. 20 March 2018. <<http://poems.poetrysociety.org.uk/poets/kayo-chingonyi/>>.
- The Royal Society of Literature.** "Patience Agbabi." *RSL Fellows*. The Royal Society of Literature, n.d. 11 December 2017. <<https://rsliterature.org/fellow/patience-agbabi/>>.
- Thomas, Ian.** "The Poet James Berry." *Black History 365*. Sugar Media and Marketing, 19 August 2015. 3 January 2018. <<http://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/poets-corner/the-poet-james-berry/>>.
- Tomlinson, Lisa.** "Una Marson: Cultural and Literary Nationalist." *Black Perspectives*. AAIHS, 26 March 2016. 28 November 2017. <<http://www.aaihs.org/una-marson/>>.
- Waters, Erika J.** "I Like Me Black Face and Me Kinky Hair." *Publications*. Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, n.d. 28 November 2017. <<https://www.wcwonline.org/WRB-Issues/i-like-me-black-face-and-me-kinky-hair>>.
- Wilkinson, Ben.** "Kumukanda by Kayo Chingonyi review – unflinching reflections." *Poetry*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 3 November 2017. 22 March 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/nov/03/kumukanda-kayo-chingonyi-review>>.