

# Re-inventing the Past at Sunday Serenade: The Residual Cultures of a British Caribbean Dance Hall

**Sherril Dodds**

University of Surrey, s.dodds@surrey.ac.uk

## Abstract

In this article, I focus on Sunday Serenade, a British Caribbean club for the ‘over 30s’ in north-west London. Given how the participants identify with expressive music and dance practices from their Caribbean ‘homeland’, I commence by examining the extent to which Raymond Williams’ (1973) concept of ‘residual cultures’ can be a useful lens through which to examine how Sunday Serenade is constructed as distinct from a dominant white culture. Yet in response, I argue that Williams’ model produces a static understanding of culture that fails to recognise the complex staging of the participants’ contemporary British lives. Therefore, I draw upon critical race studies and diaspora theory to explore how the participants of Sunday Serenade refuse to be contained within a discourse of sameness through their engagement with transnational music and dance practices, but promote a corporeality that is economically, culturally and socially distinct.

KEYWORDS: British Caribbean, Raymond Williams, popular dance, music, diaspora, race

## Introduction

The impact of cultural studies on dance research cannot be underestimated. Over the previous decade or so, dance scholars have increasingly adopted theories and methods drawn from the field of cultural studies, thus enabling a close examination of how dance practice is produced and consumed within a dynamic set of social relations that is historically constituted and responsive to specific aesthetic, economic and political conditions (Desmond 2000; Sklar 2000). In this article, attention turns to the work of Raymond Williams, one of the early exponents of cultural studies research, and in particular his 1973 essay *Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory*. In this essay, Williams employs a critical Marxist approach to argue that the cultural arena operates through the competing forces of dominant, residual and emergent cultures. While I acknowledge that this work was developed almost forty years ago, its critique of economic determinism and its exposition of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony as a lens through which to explore class relations offer

a useful starting point for my dance case study under investigation here. Indeed, more than twenty years later, Hall (1996: 36) describes the essay as ‘seminal’ and Turner (1996: 55) observes that ‘Williams’ work remains strikingly original and compelling reading.’

The focus of my research centres on Sunday Serenade, a British Caribbean dance hall for those 30 years or older in north-west London. Situated just off a rather shabby stretch of the busy North Circular ring road, the participants meet every Sunday night in the function suite of a public leisure centre to dance to the popular tunes of the past: 1960s ska and rocksteady, and 1970/80s reggae, soul and rhythm and blues. The explicit engagement with black popular music from a bygone era appears to lend itself well to Williams’ (1973) notion of a ‘residual culture’ that exists in contradistinction to a ‘dominant’ white British culture. Notably, while Williams’ model provides a theoretical framework for the study of class relations, his work fails to address its intersection with matters of race and nation. Thus, my aim within this article is to consider the extent to which Williams’ categorisation of a ‘residual culture’ can be applied to the music and dance practices of Sunday Serenade and to further complicate this reading through the contemporary perspectives of diaspora theory and critical race studies (Brah 1996; James and Harris 1993; Julios 2008; Monson 2003; Murdoch 2007; Ramsay 2003). From this, I seek to argue that Sunday Serenade should not be understood as a residual diasporic yearning for a Caribbean homeland, but as a more complex staging of the contemporary lives of British Caribbean people. In so doing, I show how the participants of Sunday Serenade strategically employ the music and dance of their ‘imagined pasts’ to position themselves as culturally, socially and economically distinct from the ‘dominant culture’. Before I move on to examine Williams’ (1973) essay in more depth, I will outline the parameters of my research design, reflect upon my own position within the research field and provide a brief description of Sunday Serenade.

## **Researching Sunday Serenade**

Sunday Serenade takes place at Bridge Park Community Leisure Centre in the London Borough of Brent, an area known for its high proportion of BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] communities and the poor social and economic living conditions experienced by those groups.<sup>1</sup> The initial phase of field research commenced on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007 with regular visits throughout the spring and summer of the same year, and occasional follow-up visits in autumn 2009 and summer 2010. In addition to the data gathered through participant observation techniques, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with regular attendees of the club: Desmond and Raymond are both in their late 60s and retired; Stacey is in her mid-40s and works in customer services; Martha is in her late 50s and is a nurse; Francine is in her mid-40s and is a care worker; Claudia is in her mid-50s and is a people management professional; and Evelyn and Dolores are both in their early 70s and retired.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Stacey who is British born, all of my interviewees were born in

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<sup>1</sup> This information comes from a report published by Brent Council in 2004 based on data from the 2001 census: [http://www.brent.gov.uk/directorate.nsf/Files/LBBA2/\\$FILE/census\\_ammend.pdf](http://www.brent.gov.uk/directorate.nsf/Files/LBBA2/$FILE/census_ammend.pdf) (accessed 11th December 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of anonymity, I have changed the names of all of my informants.

Jamaica and set up residency in the United Kingdom in child- or early adulthood. The field data is further supported by informal conversations with the club organisers, the DJs and toasters, and other participants with whom I came into contact.<sup>3</sup>

Given that Sunday Serenade is predominantly attended by British Caribbean people, it is important to position myself as a white British scholar within the research context.<sup>4</sup> In an examination of ‘race-of-interviewer-effects’, Gunaratnam (2003) argues that racialised matching of interview and respondent should not be held as an ideal scenario; instead, a reflexive approach to interviewing that recognises the power relations between different identity positions offers a more fruitful approach. At Sunday Serenade, my racial difference clearly provoked some concerns, and on my first few visits I was regularly questioned about my intentions at the club. This is perhaps not surprising as both Winston, the bartender, and Raymond alluded to attempts to close down the club, and my outsider status obviously raised questions. While I recognise that a white racial identity can be a position of power and privilege (Skeggs 2004), other aspects of my identity offered opportunities for connection. In my early 40s, I sit within the target age range of Sunday Serenade and as a lone female participant I quickly struck up a close relationship with Dolores who also attended alone. Although over time I was warmly welcomed at the club by a range of individuals, my positionality as a white British researcher undoubtedly shaped how I collected and interpreted the field data and impacts how participants behaved and responded towards me.

As I suggest above, the club is promoted as an over-30s event, and the majority of participants are in their 40s or above, with many in their late 50s, 60s and early 70s, and an even balance of men and women regularly attend. Entrance to the event costs £5.00 and, although the leisure centre has a rather drab utilitarian feel, the function suite in which Sunday Serenade takes place marks a striking contrast through its weekly transformation by the event organisers. The space is almost entirely blacked out, save for a few strings of brightly coloured neon lights, and the tables arranged around the sides of the room are nicely decorated with tablecloths, flowers, balloons and tea lights. A makeshift bar is located in the far corner and the sound system blasts out its thunderous bass tones at the other. Indeed, the volume of the music is so overpowering that there exists little opportunity for audible conversation except for fleeting moments between tracks. The dancing itself predominantly occurs around the edges of the room and ranges from a subtle swaying action through to flamboyant and individualistic motifs. Although the movement quality is largely dictated by the rhythm and tempo of the music, most striking of all is the prevalence and diversity of dancing on display. For instance, I have observed forms of ‘shuffling’ and ‘skanking’ typically associated with ska; twisting, jiving and salsa; the weighty jogging motion that

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3 The production of music at Sunday Serenade takes place through a ‘sound system’ which collectively refers to the record decks and vast speakers that create highly amplified bass frequencies, the disc jockeys (DJs) who select the music and the ‘toasters’ who introduce and speak over the tracks (Gilroy 1987).

4 Although the majority of participants are Black British, there is an elderly white British male who is a regular attendee, a white British male once performed a DJ set and I have observed different white British women on three occasions.

frequently accompanies reggae; a slow, intimate partner dance known as ‘the cool and deadly’; and a basic quick, quick slow step that utilises a formal ballroom hold. I return to this matter of diversity later, but for now attention returns to Raymond Williams.

## **Raymond Williams: dominant, residual and emergent cultures**

Williams commences his article *Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory* (1973) with the quintessential Marxist tenet that the economic base determines the socio-political superstructure. Yet Williams (*ibid.*) insists that rather than conceiving this relationship as a fixed and causal one, it can be more productively understood as a set of dynamic power relations that are situated within specific historical moments. He therefore draws on the Gramscian notion of hegemony to explain how social relations and the cultural field are maintained, negotiated and modified.<sup>5</sup> As Turner (1996) identifies, ideological domination is secured through consent rather than force. Consequently, relations between the dominant and subordinate classes constitute a lived reality that produces ‘conflict, difference and contradiction’ (*ibid.*: 55).

For Williams (1973) there exists a dominant ideology that is expressed through belief systems, values and cultural practices. He argues that its omnipotence lies in its call to tradition in that its capacity to appear transparent or universal is maintained through its claims to longevity and the past. Yet he warns that this is a highly selective process in which the dominant emphasises some moments while overlooking others and continually serves its interests by diluting or reinterpreting ideas in its favour. Furthermore, Williams (1973) conceives the dominant not as a static phenomenon, but one that is continually dynamic and responsive. Thus, while it can facilitate ‘alternative’ or ‘oppositional’ world views these can never exceed the dominant centre.<sup>6</sup>

The way in which the dominant accommodates other views, beliefs and practices can be seen through what Williams (*ibid.*) describes as ‘residual’ or ‘emergent’ cultures. He conceives residual culture as ‘experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture’ (*ibid.* 1973: 10). A residual culture is that which is rooted in a former social existence and therefore placed at a distance from the dominant culture. An emergent culture is then a set of new meanings and values that the dominant attempts to incorporate quickly into its ideological frame. While the dominant cannot possibly grasp and control all forms of cultural production, it is clearly attentive to those practices that pose a potential risk to its stability. As Williams states, ‘in capitalist practice, if the thing is not making a profit, or if it is not being widely circulated, then it can for some time be overlooked, at least while it remains alternative’

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<sup>5</sup> In an article on ragtime dance, George-Graves (2009) comments on how few dance scholars have worked with the notion of hegemony. She employs this theoretical apparatus through which to argue that, although concepts of primitivism served dominant racial discourses in response to ragtime, this music and dance offered African Americans a distinctive sense of ownership.

<sup>6</sup> While ‘alternative’ refers to those seeking to live a different life, ‘oppositional’ refers to those who want to produce change, but there exists a fine balance between the two (Williams 1973: 11).

(ibid.: 12). Specifically in relation to the arts, Williams (ibid.) observes that there exists a mix of residual and emergent features, although the dominant perpetually seeks to incorporate the residual and transform the emergent, which then changes how the dominant expresses itself.

In response to these ideas, Grossberg (1993) identifies the Gramscian paradigm as a non-reductive Marxism, while Hall (1996) traces the development of Williams' thinking from conceiving culture as a 'whole way of life' to understanding it as a site of contestation between different ways of life. Although this offers a more nuanced, dynamic and complex framework for the relations between economic and social structures, attention remains firmly rooted in the interactions between dominant and subordinate classes. Indeed, Williams' preoccupation with class relations neglects to consider how other identity markers are shaped by and responsive to the material conditions of economic production, social structures and cultural practices. Within the field of diaspora studies, James and Harris (1993) argue against the classic Marxist position that the economic structure determines political or ideological relations and instead assert that only after racism has been set in motion can it begin to impact on the economy. Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, they argue that race is the vehicle through which class relations are lived. Consequently, race affects how class is constructed (ibid.). Likewise, Brah (1996) observes how diasporic communities are constituted through their lived practices and that these are formed through the multiple lenses of race, gender, class, age, religion, sexuality and so on. In light of these arguments, I now want to consider the extent to which Williams' notion of residual cultures can be applied to the music and dance expressions of the participants at Sunday Serenade.

## **The residual cultures of Sunday Serenade**

In order to make sense of the expressive practices of British Caribbean people, it is important to situate this community within a geo-historical lineage. Through tracing the socio-political frameworks that have shaped British Caribbean existence, this potentially offers a rationale for why the participants of Sunday Serenade engage in the music and dance styles of a bygone era. In advance of examining the emergence of the Caribbean community within the United Kingdom, I consider first the Caribbean 'homeland'. As Murdoch (2007: 575) identifies, the lives of Caribbean people are characterised through experiences of 'encounter, invention and transformation'. Murdoch (ibid.) describes how the Spanish colonisation of the Caribbean brought with it outside disease and excess labour that almost erased the indigenous communities of the region by 1600. The Caribbean islands are therefore primarily populated by those who have arrived through slavery, indentured labour or migration and, in light of this, the historical and symbolic meanings of the Caribbean need to be understood through concepts of transnationalism and diaspora (Murdoch 2007). In reference to the Caribbean region, James (1993) details how its class and racial relations were historically based on a hierarchy of colour. In a complex matrix determined by parentage and skin shade, James (ibid.) explains how light-skinned slaves, for example, were better treated than those with dark skin and these relations were not simply ideological, but produced material realities of difference and privilege that affected labour

and class position. Thus while particular social codes of class and race characterised the Caribbean, the migrant passage to the United Kingdom produced an altogether different conception of Caribbean identity.

The arrival of Caribbean communities in Britain is historically and symbolically marked by the docking of the ship the *Empire Windrush* in 1948 at Tilbury, Essex which brought with it in the region of 490 West Indian passengers hoping to build a new life in Britain (Julios 2008; Murdoch 2007). As James (1993) recounts, however, the nuanced hierarchy of skin shades that had come to define racial and class position within the Caribbean did not translate to the British context. Instead, Caribbean migrants were uniformly constituted as 'West Indian', 'black' or other derogatory terms (*ibid.*). Furthermore, James (*ibid.*) observes that while the Caribbean islands are often geographically distant from each other, thus producing distinct cultural and identity formations, within the United Kingdom the peoples of the Caribbean were collapsed into a single West Indian identity:<sup>7</sup>

The whole experience of living in a white racist society has helped to forge a black identity where in many cases such an identity did not exist previously or was not consciously thought about (James 1993: 243).

Consequently, peoples of the Caribbean diaspora are both conceived and self-identify through the lens of a common 'we' (Brah 2006). In tracing the history of the Caribbean experience in Britain, Julios (2008) examines how public discourse shapes British identity. She commences with the occurrence of World War II and reflects upon how the threat of invasion from external forces roused a strong sense of national identity as a strategy to maintain morale both for the fighting troops and for those left behind. This understanding of British-ness articulated itself as historically timeless and bound through the English language (*ibid.*). Consequently, the post-war arrival of the *Empire Windrush* was met with considerable hostility and legislation that negatively impacted on the living rights of Caribbean people in Britain:

Those who were allowed to settle in Britain were largely expected to learn the English language, adapt to the country's customs and become part of British society's everyday life (Julios 2008: 16).

James (1993) comments that, within post-war Britain, the relationship between migration and racism was central to African-Caribbean identity formation. He argues that the way in which African-Caribbean people identify themselves in the United Kingdom impacts their social and political actions. As the history of colonialism has sought to exert economic and political domination, it has also constructed a distorted and oppressive self-image of colonised peoples (*ibid.*). Consequently, British Caribbean people are both produced through and reactive to this history of marginalisation.

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<sup>7</sup> James (1993) notes that Port of Spain, Trinidad and Kingston, Jamaica are of a similar distance apart to that of London and Moscow.

The narrative of exclusion and homogenisation that I outline above is one that clearly impacted various participants at Sunday Serenade. In remembering her arrival in Britain, Evelyn comments,

It wasn't very easy for black people. It was very, very tough ... We didn't even know that we could get loans from the banks to get somewhere to live. We didn't know we could get a council flat, we didn't know nothing. No-one guide us along (Interview with Evelyn, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2007).

Goldberg (2000) employs the term 'racially marginalised' to describe the intersecting economic and racial discrimination experienced by a 'black underclass'.<sup>8</sup> These ideas resonate with Evelyn's experiences of a racial hierarchy that precluded her from immediate access to social and economic welfare. A similar sense of social exclusion is referenced by Raymond in discussing the provision of cultural engagement for the Caribbean diaspora in his formative experience of Britain:

We weren't able to get our membership for any of the working men's clubs and their functions ... we organised our own functions at small organisations that we belonged to. We used places like the Porchester Hall and Lyceum Ballroom, that sort of thing, and organised dances ... Well, in early days, you have to break into these things, you know. In those days, there were the first Race Relations Act I think in about 1962 or something. Prior to that they could easily say, 'sorry, you can't come in' (Interview with Raymond, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

In response to the explicit racism that greeted the initial arrival of Caribbean migrants, Julios (2008) identifies a shift in public discourse from the 1960s to 1980s, rooted in concepts of multiculturalism. She traces how the influx of Caribbean and other migrant communities prompted concerns as these populations were largely forced to settle in overcrowded inner-city locations with little in the way of welfare support. While the government sought to limit immigration, it also recognised the inequalities faced by migrant communities, thus putting into place legislative measures against discrimination (Julios 2008). Julios (*ibid.*) describes how this developed through a discourse of 'multiculturalism' and 'pluralism', the rhetoric of which offered a model of social existence in which diverse cultures could co-exist. Yet several scholars critique the project of multiculturalism as little more than a utopian policy that fails to acknowledge the lived realities of social and economic difference as experienced by migrant communities (Barucha 2000; Ghandi 1998). Evidence of this perhaps emerges through some basic demographic data provided by the London Borough of Brent, in which Sunday Serenade takes place. It seems no coincidence that black and ethnic minorities are proportionally greater than the white British community and that the borough suffers from overcrowded living conditions and high rates of unemployment among black British workers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Goldberg (2000: 166) draws on Gunnar Myrdal's concept of the 'underclass' to describe those peoples underemployed and disenfranchised in post-industrial society. He uses this concept to examine how the popular media read the underclass in relation to black stereotypes that convey drug use, welfare reliance and criminality.

<sup>9</sup> See Note 1.

It is this complex history detailed above that produces a distinctive British Caribbean diasporic experience and through which Williams' notion of residual cultures comes into play. Julios (2008) observes that the hostile reception to migrant communities results in a diasporic need to cling to a distant 'homeland' rather than a commitment to embrace the adopted culture. The notion of 'home', however, is not always a place of intended return, but rather a mythical site located in the diasporic imagination (Brah 1996; Braziel & Mannur 2003). In a study of 'race music', Ramsay (2003) identifies the importance of cultural memory in constructing meaning and that music is a conduit through which to access memories from the past. I would argue that the same can be said of dance as many of the respondents from Sunday Serenade used their early memories of dance as a means of constructing a vision of their Caribbean homeland:

I remember the first time we used to have day and night dancing in the market place when people are not selling food, they clean it up and they dance there. And I could only stand and look through the fence, you know, and see people doing it and I'd get home and try it myself (Interview with Raymond, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

Ah, my mum, she can dance, and my dad. And we used to have in Jamaica, they used to call it 'lawn dance', they used to have dance, we used to watch people dancing from a young age (Interview with Francine, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2007).

I used to love the sound, 'cause I used to live in the countryside, you see. And they used to have a dance, say, once every two weeks in a special place like. And I used to go there as a kid. I was only about 12. Going there and watching them dance. And I used to love the way they were dancing and I loved to hear the music (Interview with Desmond, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

From a very young age we always dancing in the West Indies. We never stop dancing there. It's always been music, music all the way through from your very small age until when you reach as old as possible. It just continues, goes on non-stop. So you see, we were brought up that way (Interview with Delores, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

In spite of the spatial and temporal distance between the participants' historical departure from the Caribbean and their contemporary British lives, their personal memories of music and dance practices facilitate an embodied identification with an idealised Jamaican past.<sup>10</sup>

James (1993: 255) describes how Caribbean experiences of racism within the United Kingdom prompted an urgent need for unification and communal experience, which he describes as a 'defence mechanism'. This desire for a shared belonging is clearly articulated

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<sup>10</sup> All of the participants I interviewed were Jamaican, although I met one man who originates from Dominica.

at Sunday Serenade. For instance, the tables are decorated with green, black and yellow balloons in reference to the colours of the Jamaican flag and the DJs construct extended familial relationships within this community, for instance, through announcing special birthday wishes to ‘Sister Barbara and Sister Angela’ and presenting bartender Winston and his wife Martha with a bouquet in celebration of their 34<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Other ways in which the DJs engineer this imagined community is through historical references to the Caribbean past. During one evening, the DJ promotes a special Sunday Serenade event in celebration of Jamaican Independence day and at another alludes to Notting Hill Carnival in saying, ‘A carnival started in 1964 in the UK... why was that?’. Indeed these references serve both as a means to engender an inclusive Caribbean identity and to remind this community of its troubled history in relation to the British nation.<sup>11</sup>



*Figure 1: A participant of the Sunday Serenade*

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<sup>11</sup> Jamaica was granted independence from British colonisation in 1962 (Scott, 2004) and, although the Notting Hill Carnival is promoted ‘as a way for Afro-Caribbeans to celebrate their own cultures and traditions’ (<http://www.thenottinghillcarnival.com/>, accessed 28th September 2010), Notting Hill was the site of bitter race riots in 1958 (Brown 2004; Gilroy 1987). The carnival is a weekend street festival that includes a parade, sound systems and stalls selling Caribbean food, and attracts over one million visitors from the UK and beyond.

Further references to a shared history are rooted in the expressive practices of Jamaican popular culture as James (1993) describes how reggae music is widely adopted amongst British Caribbean people as a means through which to access an imagined cultural heritage. At Sunday Serenade, the participants embody this re-connection to a Jamaican past as they dance to popular ska, rocksteady and reggae tracks from the 1960s and 70s, such as *Everything Crash* (1968) by the Ethiopians, *54-46 That's My Number* (1969) by Toots and the Maytals and *Dreamland* (1971) by Bunny Wailer. In reference to music and cultural memory, Ramsay (2003) describes how these traces from the past participate in the production of social identities. He asserts that within the context of particular racial communities, a sense of 'family' or 'group' consciousness bears a close relationship to music; I would further this connection through the concomitant dance practices within the British Caribbean context of Sunday Serenade.

To some extent, the sonic and embodied quotations of a Caribbean past through references to popular music and dance speak to Williams' notion of a residual culture. Given the hostility encountered by first-generation Caribbean migrants, the alignment with Jamaican music and dance practices of the 1960s and 70s at Sunday Serenade may be read as a strategic 'alternative' to the dominant white British culture. From the perspective of cultural Marxism as espoused by Williams, the residual sounds and dance practices from the Caribbean past offer the participants of Sunday Serenade different expressive practice to the cultural mainstream, but pose no real threat to the hegemonic order. Yet this seems to construct an essentialist understanding of British Caribbean people that fixes them within an idealised Jamaican homeland that bears no relation to the present. The expressive practices of the Caribbean diaspora are therefore constituted as little more than a remnant or trace of a distant past.

## **Complicating the past through re-inventing the present**

The idea that the participants of Sunday Serenade are unified through an attachment to a Caribbean homeland assumes a residual and static construction of culture that fails to address its complex positioning both in relation to the past and within the present. I therefore wish to complicate these ideas through exploring the transnational production of music, dance and identity. In terms of music, Monson (2003) argues that the idea of a collective engagement by the African diaspora in a coherent 'black music' produces a cultural absolutism rooted in a 'black'/'white' aesthetics. In response to the musical interests of the participants at Sunday Serenade and an examination of some of the tracks played, I seek to probe this critique further to destabilise the reductive connection between an authentic Caribbean music and an essential Caribbean identity. In questioning the participants about their musical tastes, they referenced a range of styles and artists:

Soul or reggae I dance to them all. 'Cause I know them all... In those days [in Jamaica] they were mostly American music they were playing. Soul music (Interview with Desmond, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

Yeah, I like it all. I like the blues and the rock 'n' roll, the R & B and the reggae and all of it. I like all of it. And the ska as well. And I like to see the

older people dance, the way people dance to it, you know (Interview with Stacey, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2007).

Black people's music is like reggae number one. It's always reggae that comes in, then you have soul, then you have... there's so many different ones... You have soul, rocksteady, you know, different versions coming in and you just groove with it (Interview with Evelyn, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2007).

The Alton Ellis, the John Holt, the Ken Boothe, that sort of music... Some of the modern stuff, R & B. Yes, the old Smokey Robinson, Patti LaBelle, Gladys Knight that sort of era... I'm interested in Motown as well (Interview with Francine, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2009).

The artists and styles cited here clearly extend beyond the Caribbean both in their production and consumption. Several of the participants reference music forms whose origins bear strong associations with the United States of America, such as soul, rhythm and blues, Motown and rock and roll. In response to these taste cultures, the Sunday Serenade sound system regularly plays tracks such as Sam Cooke's *Twistin' The Night Away* (1962), Diana Ross and The Supremes' *Where Did Our Love Go* (1964), The Jackson 5's *Rockin' Robin* (1972) and The Temptations' *Lady Soul* (1986). While genres such as soul and rhythm and blues have roots in African American creation and reception (Rye 2010; Wilton 2010), Bowman (2010) describes how the Motown label sought 'to reach black and white audiences' and Walser (2010) conceives rock and roll as a 'a merger of black rhythm and blues with white country music'. While Walser (2010) acknowledges that the rock and roll genre was largely appropriated from rhythm and blues, Gammond (2010) identifies that it is represented both through African American artists, such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard, and white American performers, such as Elvis Presley and Bill Haley. Hence, the influence of music exported from the United States has clearly impacted the musical interests of the participants of Sunday Serenade.

The same pattern of musical exchange that has characterised forms such as rock and roll is also evident with those genres located in the cultural imagination as quintessentially Jamaican in style. Heathcott (2003) traces how the 'Jamaican sounds' of ska, rocksteady and reggae are more productively conceived as transnational forms articulated in localised spaces of production and consumption. For example, first wave ska, which emerged in the dance halls of Jamaica in the early 1960s and is frequently played at Sunday Serenade, is indebted to traditional and contemporary musical sources that span British, American and Jamaican popular forms (Heathcott 2003). These complex transnational histories are clearly located in the selection of music played at Sunday Serenade. For instance, at my most recent visit in August 2010, as I arrived and paid my entrance fee at the table directly outside the function suite where Sunday Serenade takes place, the usual voluminous and heavy bass line of the back to back reggae music that characterises the early part of the evening resonated through my body. The track playing was a reggae cover of a Bobby Darin song called *Dream Lover*, which reached the number two position in the American Billboard popular music charts in 1959 ([www.bobbydarin.net](http://www.bobbydarin.net), accessed 24<sup>th</sup> September

2010). As a white American singer, Darin is described, along with a number of white British artists such as Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard, as ‘groomed by their industry to supply a blander, more respectable version of rock and roll’ (Manuel 2010). Yet the version played at Sunday Serenade was released in 1972 by a British reggae band, Greyhound. Consequently, as *Dream Lover* blasts out through the huge bass tone speakers in North West London, it brings together an intricate musical history that crosses Jamaica, North America and the United Kingdom. Later that evening, I also hear *Picture on the Wall* (1985) by the Natural-Ites, a reggae band based in Nottingham, United Kingdom.

While the music of Sunday Serenade almost entirely comprises popular music genres and styles from the past, it quickly becomes apparent that these sounds cannot be directly traced back to a Caribbean homeland, but are instead situated in a transnational nexus of production and consumption. Ties to the Caribbean past are then further re-routed as the participants of Sunday Serenade respond to this music of a bygone era through dancing to it within a contemporary British landscape. I demonstrate above how several of the participants describe their formative dancing years within the context of their Jamaican homeland. Yet given that their lives as young adults were situated within the United Kingdom, these British dancing experiences have played into their embodied responses to music. Indeed several of the participants recalled opportunities for dancing in their young British lives:

Yes, we used to go out dancing at Hammersmith Palais for years, you know we used to go to a place in London, forget what it used to be called, yes, we used to go to dance down there, but most of the times was Hammersmith Palais (Interview with Evelyn, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2007).

Well, when I came to this country, first we used to have blues dance. You go to church hall, you go to houses and then you go to clubs, and this is where I started (Interview with Delores, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

We used to go to parties and obviously you get to know the beats and new dances that came out. And at the party they’d be teaching you the latest dance and then you’d all do the same dance (Interview with Claudia, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2007).

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that I observe a range of dance styles. For instance, I catch fleeting moments of jive or swing, which both Raymond and Evelyn link with the introduction of rock and roll music:

It was mostly rock ‘n’ roll in them days ... they’d have Bill Haley and his Comets just came in doing ‘Rock Rock Rock’ and everyone want to dance like Bill Haley (Interview with Raymond, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

Rock ‘n’ roll and all those kinds of things. It’s what we call swing in the old-fashioned way (Interview with Evelyn, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2007).

With reggae, I often see regulars such as Desmond and Mirabelle execute the weighty jogging motion typically performed by international reggae artist Bob Marley, and with ska music comes ‘skanking’, in which participants swing their arms back and forth across their torsos in a relaxed grounded stance or ‘shuffling’, a rapid ‘ball change’ action that switches from foot to foot. As Raymond describes,

There are a few records that are definitely shuffle music and someone starts shuffling, then someone will walk in, join, then three or four of us, like a competition. An unarranged competition! (Interview with Raymond, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

Yet this embodied knowledge has not necessarily passed down through all generations. Stacey recognises the links between ska music and shuffling from her parents’ generation, but feels more able herself to perform a generic club dance style in which her hips undulate and arms wrap and unfold around the body:

I’d love to be able to do it, what they do. The way they dance to certain music, ska music and stuff like that. I’d love to be able to shuffle and do the mashed potato and all that old stuff. I can’t do it obviously (Interview with Stacey, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2007).

Martha meanwhile describes another dancer at the club:

There is a guy that comes. He dance salsa ... I think; he’s a really good salsa dancer (Interview with Martha, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2007).

Significantly, Martha’s own knowledge of salsa has no connection to her migrant passage, but instead is acquired through travel opportunities afforded by global tourism.

Well I went to Cuba last year and in Cuba they do a lot of Salsa. And we went into the bushes and they had this restaurant and the guys who were playing the music and he was teaching me to do the salsa. So I caught on a little bit of it (Interview with Martha, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2007).

Similarly, as another recreational pastime, Evelyn has attended modern ballroom dance classes in London. As a member of the Caribbean diaspora, her body is re-choreographed through a European dance form and she performs this duality within the context of a British Caribbean dance hall. Her body is thus inscribed as a site of transnational performance that brings her past into relief with the present.

In relation to black vernacular music styles, Ramsay (2003) argues against the idea that African Americans are invested in an ahistorical and idealised past, but instead articulate a living and changing present through their musical practices. Other scholars support this conception of diasporic communities as Monson (2003) describes ‘black music’ as a dynamic and constantly re-imagined cultural identification that is geo-historically situated and Murdoch (2007) conceives the Caribbean diaspora through the re-invention of nation and belonging. For Murdoch (2007: 576), transcultural identity is ‘grounded in communities and locations eventuated in history and expanding and protean in the

present'. From this I would argue that the music and dance practices of Sunday Serenade cannot be essentialised through the residual paradigm of a fixed Caribbean homeland, but are multiple and contemporary expressions that unsettle the racist mythology of a singular Caribbean identity. As Ramsay (2003) suggests, the cultural memories of music (and its associated dance practices) are the benchmarks against which communities can re-imagine or create alternative identities. While the music of Sunday Serenade plays an important role in tracing memories and experiences of migration, its expression through dance is located within a contemporary site of transnational histories that are staged through diverse embodied knowledges.

Turino and Lea (2004: 10) assert that artistic practices are 'heightened forms of representation' that signal difference from the everyday and which can therefore offer a space through which to imagine new subject positions. In response, I would conceive the participants of Sunday Serenade as a creative community that employs music and dance to articulate a spatial, economic, cultural and social distinctiveness. As detailed above, the history of racism and hostility directed at British Caribbean people collapsed this community into a singular identity that produced significant social and economic inequalities. In response, I argue that the participants of Sunday Serenade seek to delineate and privilege their diasporic identity. This distinctiveness is marked spatially as, although the event is hidden at a perfunctory leisure centre in a rundown area of London, the venue is transformed into a site of celebration with its balloons, lights, flowers and all-encompassing soundscape.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Sunday Serenade constitutes a self-reliant micro economy that serves the music and dance interests of members of the Caribbean diaspora. The £5.00 entrance fee covers the catering, venue and sound system hire, and this basic cash economy remains primarily within the circulation of the British Caribbean community who control the production and consumption of the event. Sunday Serenade also disrupts the hierarchical paradigm of majority/minority relations that has typically excluded or marginalised minority diasporas (Brah 1996) given that it is almost exclusively represented by British Caribbean people. While Sunday Serenade marks a distinctive spatial, cultural, economic and social praxis for the Caribbean diaspora, the social choreographies of its participants refuse to be collapsed into an identity of sameness, but instead express multiple transcultural histories of music and dance interests.

## **Conclusion**

To return to the thinking of Raymond Williams, he usefully offers an understanding of culture that forms a dynamic site of regulation, contestation and negotiation. For Williams, residual cultures are a means through which subordinated groups can articulate an alternative position to the dominant order. Yet this model is rooted purely in class relations and the notion of a past or residual culture fails to recognise how those cultural practices are re-situated within the context of the present. In relation to my case study example,

<sup>12</sup> I suggest that the event is 'hidden' from the cultural mainstream as the only advertisements for Sunday Serenade are through RJR 94FM, a specialist Jamaican radio station (<http://www.rjr94fm.com/>, accessed 28th September 2009) and word of mouth.

the introduction of critical race theory and diaspora studies complicate the relations between class, race and nation and this can be traced through the hostile reception towards Caribbean migrants on their entry into the United Kingdom and the social, economic and cultural marginalisation that ensued. In conclusion, I argue that the participants of Sunday Serenade cannot be reduced to a stable and coherent community that identifies with a fixed Caribbean homeland; rather they constitute a historically-located site of transcultural exchange that produces unstable boundaries of nation and belonging. This multiplicity is evidenced through the dancing bodies of Sunday Serenade who refuse to be contained within a discourse of sameness, but promote a corporeality that is economically, culturally and socially distinct.

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## POVZETEK

V članku se osredotočam na britansko karibski klub Sunday Serenade v severozahodnem Londonu, ki je namenjen ljudem nad 30 let. Glede na to, kako se obiskovalci kluba identificirajo z glasbo in plesnimi praksami iz njihove karibske domovine, se lotim proučevanja uporabnosti koncepta 'rezidualnih kultur' Raymonda Williamsa (1973), da bi ugotovila, ali je ta koncept sploh uporaben za proučevanje tega, kako se klub Sunday Serenade vzpostavlja kot drugačen od dominantne bele kulture. Trdim, da Williamsov model proizvaja statično razumevanje kulture in ne uspe prepoznati kompleksnega uprizarjanja sodobnih britanskih življenj, kot jih izvajajo ti obiskovalci. Zato se naslonim tudi na kritične študije rase in teorije diaspore, da bi ugotovila, kako obiskovalci Sunday Serenade odklanjajo vpetost v diskurz istosti prek njihovega stika s transnacionalnimi glasbenimi in plesnimi praksami in spodbujajo telesnost, ki je ekonomsko, kulturno in družbeno drugačna.

**Ključne besede:** britanski Karibčani, Raymond Williams, popularni ples, glasba, diaspora, rasa

**CORRESPONDENCE:** SHERRIL DODDS, University of Surrey, Department of Dance, Film and Theatre, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH, United Kingdom. E-mail: s.dodds@surrey.ac.uk.