About the Boys

About the Boys:
Stories from the Urban Community

By

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**
P U B L I S H I N G

To Martin

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Acronyms

BME   Black and minority ethnic
CAMHS   Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
DfEE   Department for Education and Employment
DfES   Department for Education and Skills
EAL   English as an additional language
GCSE   General Certificate of Secondary Education
LEA   Local Education Authority
ONS   Office for National Statistics
PLASC   Pupil Level Annual School Census

Terms used with respect to ethnicity

When referring to the ethnicity of participants I employ the terms used by the participants themselves.

I refer to my own ethnicity as 'White'

Four participants refer to themselves as 'Black'.

Three participants refer to themselves as Somali, and/or Muslim

Throughout the dissertation I have used 'Black' and 'African Caribbean' interchangeably with usage determined by context, e.g. in discourse relating to the government or the Local Authority, I have used the term 'African Caribbean'.

In the historical overview the term 'West Indian' is used where it was in common usage at the time.

PROLOGUE

At a time of unprecedented international immigration, 2003 – 2008, seven boys, Somali and African Caribbean are working their way through their primary and secondary education. It is inner city Bristol and like large cities across the UK, local communities and schools are receiving many thousands of Somali refugees at their doorstep. In the boys' primary school new priorities are swiftly established in the staff room, and a new pecking order develops in the playground.

In an attempt to improve relations between rival groups, the seven boys are referred into a Year 6 social skills group. Five years later I meet the boys again, and at home with their mothers, grandmothers and siblings, hear stories of exclusion and disappointment, ambition and success as they progress towards their GCSE examinations.

As the Labour government falls and a Coalition takes its place there is a fresh appraisal of education policy and immigration. The national Census of 2011 confirms just how much demographic change has occurred with increases in the population of England and Wales of 7.1% and in Bristol of no less than 9.8%, with over half of these increases being due to migration.

This book tells the stories of boys who lived through and were part of those changes, from the point of view of those boys arriving as refugees as well as from the perspective of settled boys who experienced the arrival and integration of young people from all over the world, into their schools and communities.

It offers insight into the achievements of families, schools and communities to cope with extraordinary change but also reflects on the wide gap in subjective experience of the different participants, as well as the White researcher, a gap that is echoed between communities and institutions and across agencies.

This book records the stories of young people and their families whose lives are lived at the leading edge of change and provides a human context to what Gillborn calls, 'colour-blind, sanitised analyses and universalistic discourses'. [1]

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[1] Gillborn, D. (2008). *Racism and Education: Coincidence or conspiracy?* London: Routledge.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I begin with a story:

It was a bright, cold March morning. The eight boys piled into a minibus followed by Vince and I, wondering in trepidation what we had let ourselves in for. The boys wriggled and squirmed, shouted and yelled in glee at having a day off school to visit the Ashton Gate Football Ground[1]. As the boys shot out of the van and into the ground I caught Vince's eye. We had been working with the group for the last six months and knew just how chaotic they could be.

The boys filed into the hallowed changing rooms and there to meet them were three players: Mathew Hill, Leroy Lita and Liam Rosenior. The boys sat on the benches and listened wide-eyed to the description of the rigorous training schedule and the disciplined lives the young men led. The boys were invited to ask questions. 'How much money do you earn?' asked one, 'What car do you drive?' asked another. 'Do you experience much racism?' asked a third boy. The group, African Caribbean and Somali boys, leaned forward to hear the replies from the Black players. 'It's not so bad now', said Liam Resenior, 'But back in the day when my dad played for West Ham, he suffered real abuse'.

Outside on the pitch the boys lined up with the players for a photograph, then freed from protocol they all turned and raced to the four corners of the stadium, eleven year old boys, running like the wind.

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Four years later, with the photo from Ashton Gate in my bag, I called at the home of one of the boys and his mother invited me in. I was there to interview the family but first I took out the photo as a reminder, a prompt perhaps to spark a memory of the group. The mother smiled. 'We have the picture up in the kitchen', she said. 'It's been there all this time'.

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[1] Ashton Gate Football Ground is the home of Bristol City Football Club.

The Research Story

At the time of the visit to the football ground Vince McLaughlin and I were working together in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (CAMHS) in East Bristol, myself as a clinical psychologist and Vince as a community psychiatric nurse. It was a busy team, receiving referrals from GPs, community paediatricians and school health nurses. Young people with eating disorders, relationship or developmental difficulties came to our clinic for assessment and therapeutic support. The work had an individual and family focus; somewhere 'out there' the young person was going to school - or not, and whilst it was important for us to know about school, it was not within our sphere of influence. Ours was a consultant-led team and the medical model was privileged.

In the late 1990s, keen to explore an alternative therapeutic model, Vince and I developed a social skills group programme for children referred to the team. The aim was to work with the children on their co-operative skills, to address difficulties they were having in managing their angry feelings. We had been running the programme successfully in a local health centre for five years when the opportunity arose to bid for funding from The Children's Fund[2] which would enable us to take our programme into primary schools. The aim of the Fund was to support targeted provision for children seen to be at risk of low educational attainment and exclusion (DfES, 2006). We formed a new team which included an educational psychologist and assistant psychologist and, in 1999-2000, ran the programme in a primary school for the first time. From 2002-2004 we ran the programme in two further primary schools whose pupils were from ethnically diverse communities.

Alongside circle time and games, participants enjoyed a range of activities including story-telling and filmed role plays. There were visitors from the local communities as well as poetry and drumming workshops. We went rock climbing – and we visited the Ashton Gate Football Ground.

Educational psychologists-in-training, (EPiTs), carried out qualitative evaluations for the three groups. The evaluation of the second group highlighted one issue that particularly concerned me, which was to do with ethnicity of the group leaders. Two of us were White and one of us, African Caribbean. In contrast the group participants consisted of four African Caribbean boys, three Somali boys and one Pakistani boy. The EPiT researchers met with the boys after the group had come to an end and asked

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[2] The Children's Fund was established by the government in 2001 to develop local partnerships with the aim of delivering services to children aged 5-13 years.

them a set of questions, one of which concerned the significance of the leaders' ethnicity. The question and their responses were as follows:

Table 1: Question 11 from the qualitative evaluation by Adams and Grizzle (2003)

Question: If you could choose a group leader, might it have been someone from your own culture (e.g. Bangladeshi or Somali)? What difference would this have made?

Answers:

- Isn't that racist?
- Colour doesn't matter
- In some situations, sometimes does, e.g. if talking about background or racism
- Don't mind
- Not necessarily – it's whoever you think helps you most or appeals to you most
- They could be green or blue
- They could have been half green, half blue with a tail
- A Black person yeah, they could be someone who doesn't listen or care what we think. A Somalian or a White person or a different colour person could be the best person for the job
- The person that understands us the most.

I found these responses which were both light-hearted and profound, deeply moving. The boys spoke of the importance of the group leaders' human qualities of warmth and attentiveness which transcend culture, and yet if 'talking about background or racism', then ethnicity did matter. It led to a belief that I *could* undertake research with children and families from cultures other than my own but on reflection accepted that as a White person with no embodied experience of racism, some research issues might be difficult and perhaps inappropriate for me to undertake. With this caveat I hoped to follow up the boys that I had come to know so well and compare their individual experiences of secondary education. The follow up became a narrative inquiry undertaken for a PhD which was carried out at the Graduate School of Education, Bristol University - and is the basis of this book.

Narratives in a Shifting Landscape

This is an inquiry rooted in time and place and *Chapter 2* introduces the city of Bristol, examines the city's infamous involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and I discover a small connection with my own seafaring forbears. I give an account of the post-war migration of West Indian people to Bristol after the Second World War, as well as the migration of displaced peoples seeking asylum, in particular the recent arrival of the Somali community.

In *Chapter 3* I explore definitions of ethnicity and 'race' and question how the politics of terminology can influence the representation of educational outcomes. The second part of the chapter considers the early educational experiences in Bristol of newly arrived West Indian children and places local concerns in the context of national inquiries into the educational attainment of West Indian children (Rampton, 1981; Swann, 1985). The colour-blind approach to the issue of underachievement by the Thatcher and Major governments is followed by an exploration of the revisionary thinking of the Blair government, which was shaped by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999). The next section gives an overview of the discourse of educational achievement of Black and African pupils at both a national and local level, beginning with a critical analysis of 'race' equality in British schools (Gillborn, 2008). National and local strategies to tackle underachievement are explored.

In *Chapter 4* an account is given of the lengths needed to make contact with the families that I hope will participate in the research. Once in the home the families choose who will join in the interview and I meet brothers and sisters, aunties and grandmothers, but no fathers.

With the interviews newly transcribed in *Chapter 5* I experiment with the creation of 'lyric poems' from the transcripts, inspired by the rhythm and repetition in my participants' accounts. The poems, as well as my field notes, extracts from the transcripts, dramatic scenes and descriptive and interpretive prose, are layered together in the retelling of each participant's story in *Chapter 6*. There is a cumulative effect as each story builds one upon the other, starting with quiet and restrained Fabian and concluding with combative and argumentative Jermaine.

In *Chapter 7* I consider the boys' stories and reflect on the different social and educational experiences, often being lived in the same school. Boys and their families express respect and deep appreciation for their schools but there are also moments of anger and resentment. During a period of time when schools are receiving a large number of international migrants, the boys comment on how well their school manages these

changes. I acknowledge the 'silent voices', in particular the boys' fathers who are alluded to and mentioned in passing but who do not appear first hand in this inquiry.

Seeing my Whiteness as 'Other'

In the second part of *Chapter 7* I describe key experiences in learning about myself as a White researcher and I explore the ways in which presentations to White, Black and Somali audiences have played a part in this learning process. Ethnicity, class, gender and age provide a daunting degree of difference between me and my participants, but there are important similarities as well. Finally as social networking appears during the course of this research journey, I wonder at its power as a new research tool.

Social scientists are very sensitive to the shifting landscape in which they work. In this book I document major demographic change brought about largely by migration and the rise and fall of governments and consequent policy changes that have born down on families, schools and communities. Peoples' stories, like education policies, are also of their moment but also have a timelessness, or perhaps more accurately, they are archetypes that help us recognise other peoples' experience. Stories of course, are always told to another person, in this case to me, a person who had much to learn about herself as White researcher.

CHAPTER TWO

JOURNEY TO THE CITY

Introduction

If this research is about the stories of seven boys' experience of secondary school, then it is also about Bristol, the city in which they have been educated and grown up. Part 1 gives a brief overview of the city's history and its infamous connection with the Atlantic slave trade. This is followed by an account of the migration of African, African Caribbean and displaced people into the city and the immigrant communities' experiences of living here. In Part 2, I describe my own personal and professional journey to the city.

Part 1: Bristol, a Historical Perspective

This section begins with a philosophical positioning in relation to historical scholarship.

A simple setting out of historical 'facts' would be drawn from a traditional form of historical scholarship with absolute knowledge claims being based on empirical knowledge which is objective and value free. It is a form of scholarship which models itself on a positivist scientific philosophy rooted in the Enlightenment (Benton and Craib, 2001).

Appleby, *et al*. (1994) lay out the argument for a 'democratic history'. Absolute knowledge has given way to a recognition that there are multiple points of view of the past, as there are of the present. Relativism takes this further and argues that the truth of a statement is relative to the position of the person making it. "Whose history is this?" a relativist would ask. "Whose interests are being served?"

Appleby *et al*. (1994) argue that:

> What historians do best is make connections with the past in order to illuminate the problems of the present and the potential of the future. (p.10)

I am accepting this premise in offering the following historical account, aware that all history is provisional and open to challenge.

The city

A Saxon settlement (*Brycgstow*: Old English, 'the place at the bridge') developed in the 10th century, bridging the Avon and six miles inland from the Bristol Channel (Coules, 2007). The town developed rapidly as a medieval port, trading principally with Ireland and mainland Europe in goods such as cloth, leather, iron and salt. The population of 15–20,000 was stricken during the Black Death of 1348–49, when a third of the population lost their lives.

From the mid 17th century, Bristol became a major participant in the 'Atlantic slave trade'[1] until Abolition in 1807 and was thereby transformed from a medieval trading port to a 'centre of early modern capitalism' (Morgan, 1993). Bristol ships exported manufactured goods to Africa, African people to America and to their slavery and returned to Bristol with sugar, tobacco, rum, rice and cotton.

By the 1640s Bristol merchants were participating in approximately 50 slaving voyages per year, to support the setting up of plantations run by slave labour in the Caribbean and North America (Eickelmann and Small, 2004). From 1698–1807, half a million enslaved Africans were shipped to America; there are no precise figures however for those who died on the march to the West African coast, those who died waiting for a ship, or who died on the crossing (Jones, 2007). On 23rd March 1807 the British Government passed the Slave Trade Act bringing to an end centuries of slavery, a period Africans call 'Maafa', a Swahili word for 'holocaust' or 'great disaster'.

The slave trade brought such wealth to the city of Bristol during the 18th century that it became known as England's second city after London, before ceding this position to Liverpool which was also rising in prosperity from the slave trade. Bristol fell further in importance during the 19th century when Britain's northern cities industrialised and became the country's pre-eminent centres of manufacturing. The Victorian engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel designed the railway which ran from London Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads, as well as the first steel steamship, the SS Great Britain, now restored and resting in dry dock in Bristol's Floating Harbour. Brunel's Suspension Bridge which spans the Avon Gorge, was completed after his death in 1864.

Bristol was severely bombed in the Second World War resulting in the complete demolition of the medieval centre of the city. Bombing affected

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[1] The 'Atlantic slave trade' is within quotes to acknowledge that the descriptive label is one of commercial enterprise and is a euphemism for the enslavement of African people.

the whole city but in the suburbs the destruction was more patchy and a large part of St. Pauls survived with its Georgian housing stock, much of it privately rented, available to accommodate the post-war migrants from the Caribbean.

As the city enters its second millennium it remains the largest city in the southwest of England. Bristol's economy, long associated with its port and trade, has broadened to include the creative media, electronics and the aerospace industries. The former city centre docks, the source of its earlier prosperity, have been regenerated as a centre for leisure and tourism. Bristol's population which declined in post war years, stabilised in the 1990s and has since been increasing; in the decade 2001-2011 there was a 9.7% increase with the 2011 census[2] recording a population of 428,100 making Bristol the 10th largest local authority in England and Wales.

The migration of African and African Caribbean people into the city

For this section I am indebted to the scholarship of Dresser and Fleming (2007) and their book, *Bristol: Ethnic Minorities and the City 1000–2001*, which documents the arrival of migrant communities into the city from all over the world. In the 16th century most of the ethnic minorities in the city were from Wales, Ireland as well as France, Holland and Germany. As a result of the slave trade a small number of Africans were brought to Bristol, some possibly given to ships' captains as 'human bonuses' after profitable slaving voyages, some brought as enslaved servants from the Caribbean and some arriving as freed men having served in the armed forces.

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At around the time of the Abolition 200 commemoration[3], I was discussing the Atlantic slave trade and Bristol's part in it with my father, Ralph Maddern. He told me about an extraordinary family connection which he wrote up in a personal communication to me:

> Slavery was finally abolished by Act of Parliament in 1807 and throughout the British Empire in 1833. However, due to slavery continuing in America until after the end of the Civil War in 1865, illegal slavers continued to operate between Africa and America. Therefore the British government of-

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[2] 2012, Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census. *The population of Bristol.*
[3] 2007 - The bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Great Britain.

fered ships' captains a reward, or prize money, if they could apprehend illegal slavers. John Maddern, a Cornishman, was one such captain.

Cornish fishing vessels ranged widely, from the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, north into the Irish Sea and south to the African coast. As they knew their seas areas well they were able to identify illegal slavers and report them to the naval patrols.

John Maddern engaged in this activity through the latter 1830s and 40s by which time he had earned enough prize money to take his family as free settlers to Australia.[4]

John Maddern was my great-great-great grandfather. My initial thrill on hearing this story subsided into a reflection that threads of connection to the slave trade must wind down, if not to all, then to very many of the white indigenous population of present-day Bristol, and in my case, the people of west Cornwall. Money was to be made it seems, not only from slavery but from its abolition as well.

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Prior to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 there were some 100 people of African descent in Bristol, mostly isolated as servants in private houses. Numbers of Black people remained small through the 19th century and into the 20th century until the post-war period, when there was a big increase of migrants from the New Commonwealth and the British West Indies. Numbers of Caribbean migrants to Bristol, based on police estimates at the time, are given below:

Table 2: Number of migrants to Bristol from the Caribbean, 1952-1965

Year	Number of Migrants
1952	150
1957	700
1960	2,000
1965	7,000

Source: Dresser and Fleming (2007)

In contrast to more restrictive legislation in the USA, the British Nationality Act of 1948 permitted West Indians the right of entry to the UK, which

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[4] A personal communication from Ralph Maddern to the author; 16th February 2010.

made the UK the default destination of choice. Early migrants were mostly ex-servicemen who had served in the RAF. The migrants were predominantly from Jamaica and Trinidad where unemployment was high (Coules, 2007) and they were drawn to Bristol by the reputation of its diverse industries and opportunities for employment. Plans to work for five years and then return home shifted into patterns of chain migration where the initial migrants were joined by family and friends, a pattern which would be replicated by Somali migrants 50 years later. The St. Pauls area in Bristol's inner city had a substantial reservoir of privately rented accommodation with landlords willing to rent to Caribbean families – unlike areas outside the city centre. Rooms were often sublet to other migrants and the resulting overcrowding only eased as families qualified for social housing or moved out to other areas.

Women were frequently employed in the NHS, mostly as ancillary and domestic staff; few qualified as nurses. Oral testimony (Dresser and Fleming, 2007) suggests that health organisations steered Black women away from enrolling on skilled training courses – a practice which would now be described as institutional racism. The public transport system, which had employed many West Indians in London, was overtly racist in Bristol; the Bristol Omnibus Company operated a colour bar. In 1963 Paul Stephenson, a Black teacher and youth worker, rang the company on behalf of Guy Bailey to request a job interview for him. The company said that they would be delighted to offer an interview but when Stephenson rang back to say that Bailey was West Indian, the interview was withdrawn (Coules, 2007). On the 30th April 1963 local activists, led by Stephenson, organised the Bristol Bus Boycott, exposing the colour bar against Black bus crews. Figures from the national political scene weighed in, four months later the colour bar was revoked and in September 1963 the company employed Raghbir Singh as a bus conductor (Dresser, 1986).

In 1964 the Labour government introduced Britain's first anti-discrimination legislation. It was championed by Tony Benn, a local MP and supporter of the boycott, who was also a member of the Wilson Labour government. St. Pauls remained at the heart of the Black community with Black businesses, shops and clubs arising to serve the local community; in 1973 the great Bob Marley came to play at the Bamboo Club.[5]

Whilst some battles on discrimination had been fought and won, the 1970s and 80s saw a contraction in the manufacturing base of the city and unemployment levels rose – reaching 30% for young Black people. The

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[5] Bob Marley played at the Bamboo Club on May 26th 1973 on the *Catch a Fire* tour. http://www.thirdfield.com/new/tours.html accessed 12.46, 03/12/2010.

increasing social tension was managed by somewhat heavy-handed polic-
ing deploying 'Stop and Search' or SUS laws which were experienced by
the Black community as harassment of their young people.

On 2nd April 1980 the Black and White Café was raided and, as if
lighting a touch paper, a riot swept through the area – the first of many
which affected inner cities throughout Britain. It sent a shock wave
through the country and, in response, funding was made available by cen-
tral and local government to stimulate the local economy. Advice and
funding was offered to Black businesses and in 1981 the first supplemen-
tary school opened in Bristol, as well as the first adult education centre in
St. Pauls. The Inkworks provided vocational and creative workshops, tar-
geting the long-term unemployed.

The Black community became steadily more visible in Bristol; Jim
Williams became the first Black Lord Mayor in 1991 and drum and bass[6]
became the heartbeat of the city. But the irresistible rise of Bristol's music
scene could not mask or make up for the underachievement of Black youth
which remained an issue for the community and, increasingly, for the Lo-
cal Authority. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 3 below.

Displaced people and the Somali community

The Second World War saw a huge displacement of people in Europe,
fleeing both Nazi and Communist regimes. Poles and Jews arrived in Bris-
tol and later Hungarians, fleeing the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.
Ugandan Asians followed in 1972 and Chileans came in 1973, escaping
from Pinochet's fascist regime. More recently refugees have arrived from
the Balkans, Rwanda, Iraq, Iran and Kurdistan and many other countries.
Whilst these nationals came in their hundreds to Bristol, with the turn of
the millennium two significantly larger waves of migration arrived: one
arising from the civil war in Somalia and the other from the accession of
the A8[7] states to the European Union in 2004.

There are no records of Somalis living in Bristol before 1950, although
it is likely that there were a small number working as labourers and sea-
men. There was a gradual increase in numbers to approximately 100 peo-
ple by 1989 (Dresser and Fleming, 2007). In 1960 Italian Somaliland and
British Somaliland had merged to become the independent Republic of
Somalia, and in 1991 the Soviet-style dictator, Siad Barre, was toppled and

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[6] A type of electronic dance music which emerged out of the rave scene in the mid-
1990s.
[7] The A8 Accession countries are: Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia,
Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic.