

# Has the Fire Burned Out? New Labour and The End of British Social Realism

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## Introduction

This thesis is a retrospective analysis of British social realism. It combines conventional academic research with professional screenwriting practice in the genre. By definition, at its advent Social Realism employed documentary realist devices to explore the inequalities of society with the objective of stimulating socio-political debate about this imbalance and thus social reform. However, contemporary forms of social realism have emerged much more depoliticised, drawing on similar subject matter but using decontextualised narrative strategies. The commitment to truth now seems to consist of an aesthetic, as opposed to a sociological imperative.

Historically, class has been a distinctive feature in much of European and World cinema, as it has provided an incisive device for contemporary understandings of inequality and social divisions. However, class depiction has been more important (and problematic) in British cinema than in other western societies for several reasons. Britain was the longest-established proletarian society where economic verticality had come to fruition earliest and relatively unchallenged in relation to other social divisions such as ethnicity and faith (Abercombie, 2000:147). Further, particular attention has been paid to the working classes of Britain in filmic representation because the social divisions that the characters represent “constitute actual or potential sources of conflict, which can be articulated for the benefit of dramatic storytelling” (Hallam, 2007: 185). However, class has never been the only source of inequality. Race has always been the dimension along which inequalities can be identified. How these dimensions relate to one another is an important question and one that is investigated in this thesis. However it remains a complex exercise; while class and race have remained consistent features in British film, class and race *inequality* has not – what are the factors involved in *producing* this situation?

This thesis will examine the current films being produced within the British social realism orbit, and consider if current narrative and sociological approaches to social realism can still produce a politicised viewer. It considers what recent socio-political influences have influenced genre, and if current realist films produce an empathy with characters that simply reconciles spectators to social issues rather than encouraging them to intellectually engage and challenge them.

However, in order to commence this investigation there must initially be an attempt to *define* what is social realism and the ways in which the British cinematic offshoot relate to this formulation. Social realism is a discursive term employed to describe films that attempt to present the effects of political, sociological and environmental factors on the development of character through depictions that emphasize a nuanced relationship between character and public institutions. Traditionally, this approach is characterised by the ideology of the practitioner, in which the filmic text offers a denouncement of the situations presented in the text, and /or a reformist or revolutionary political ideology that is insinuated into the narrative by the actions of the protagonist or the systemic effects on him/her that suggest that the adverse social circumstances could be altered by the introduction of more benevolent social policies. Social realism tends to be associated with observational camerawork that emphasises situations and an episodic narrative structure, creating ‘gritty’ character studies of urban life.

In the UK, social realism is commonly associated with ‘kitchen sink’ drama that investigates controversial issues such as domestic violence, alcoholism and drug abuse. But not all social issue dramas are necessarily social realist in form. Social dramas often focus on individual characters and invariably have a narrative structure characteristic of mainstream films; social realism is associated with ensemble casts and multistranded narratives with narrational motivation dispersed across a range of diverse characters, events and situations. There is also a difference in the treatment of theme. In social issue films, the individual’s problems present a problem *for* society, as opposed to being perceived as a problem created *by* society as in social realism (Hallam, 2000:190).

Emile Zola famously formulated a theory of fictional representation defined as naturalism. According to Zola, the practitioner’s objective should be to conduct an anthropological study of men and women in a similar form to that of naturalists studying animals, reporting, observing, while eschewing judgment on any subjective perspective. The aim was to be as objective as scientists, the facts would speak for themselves but only if they were accurately and fully presented (Hallam, 2000:5). However, Georg Lukacs problematised this observational approach in *Writer and Critic*, where he declared that this lacks the authenticity of perspective as the social experience is “described from the standpoint of a distant observer, when it should be narrated from the standpoint of the participant” (Lukacs, 1970: 111). As we will learn from the work of



Ken Loach, he extended the boundaries of this theory by establishing a character/institutional relationship that would contextualise the reality, and marrying this with a definite perspective on the issues presented, with an intellectual impetus influenced by the socio-political critique of Marxism.

Social realism has a specific political dimension that travels beyond aesthetics. But how do we define what is a politically engaged film? When considering the relationship between one social class and another, or the nature of government institutions, we are investigating matters that are in part 'political'. From a certain perspective, politics refers to all aspects of social life where there is evident inequality of agency between two or more demographics and there is an attempt to either sustain or remedy the imbalance in those relationships. In that sense, politics is everywhere (Abbercrombie: 2000: 400). Further, politics refers to the government and its institutions that in combination regulate British society, including Parliament which sets the context of law, social policy and the civil service that implements them.

The broader question that is being investigated is if there has been a shift in emphasis between the idea of structure (i.e. institutions, socio-economic arrangements) and agency (i.e. individual's moral failings / decisions) in social realist filmmaking. How to trace the shifting political positions and alignments of a specific film genre around much broader changes within political economy must be approached from several critical angles. Firstly, this must be approached on a sociological terrain, via the grand questions of how society coheres and changes, questions that have been addressed by social theorists such as Karl Marx. From this position, an examination can be conducted of the defining concepts that relate to the sociological vocabulary of social realist cinema – concepts like identity, status, community, class, economy, which are all related to one another and have more semantic possibilities than linear, cause-effect filmic language, and through which it is easier to comprehend the social process.

Secondly, in-depth consideration must be given to the political process; the dominant political narrative of the period, its effects on society and its influence in the cultural economy in which the filmic artefact is cultivated; the art that the political circumstances generate. For this to be achieved, an investigation is conducted into the ideological character of the New Labour government, specifically in relation to class, race, the economy and culture. These are all

distinctive subjects within the political discourse of New Labour, however the objectives for each were carried out, and will be considered, under the political philosophy of neoliberalism. Within this philosophy, an examination of multiculturalism is conducted. Multiculturalism under New Labour was constructed as a space for racial and cultural differences to co-exist comfortably; however, this thesis will consider whether their multicultural discourse led to the cul de sac of credible race politics. Relatively, with specific regard to class, Labour rejected class conflict as their political ideology, manifest in the language and representation of social policy, employing new terms such as social exclusion, hard working families and the underprivileged. Crucially, the language of New Labour represented a shift away from the previously held idea that inequalities are the product of class society and its relationship with capitalism.

Thirdly, there is an investigation of the cultural policy, which attempted to sync New Labour's economic and social intentions to produce a commercialised British artistic culture. This approach accepted commercialism with the idea that social cohesion and commercial revenue could be combined in a coherent cultural discourse. This carries the thesis into a textual analysis of contemporary social realism and an examination of the effects of neoliberalism on the sociological approach to the genre and its on screen results. On this terrain, there is a consideration of the film policy, embodied in the creation of the UK Film Council, the filmic texts and the context in which they were produced, with due regard to the triangularisation that is politics, society and culture; if class and race inequality is no longer a party political issue, how can it be represented adequately in British film culture?

In the past, there have been a number of individuals responsible for conducting investigations into the British film industry, in particular in relation to race and class like those commissioned by the government or governing bodies like the Arts Council, the Film Council, the British Film Institute, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport; media groups like the BBC and Channel 4, and as well as of course the academic community. Thus, it is important to state that it is an impossible task within the parameters of this thesis to investigate all aspects of the British film industry, and all films in relation to social realism and its associated issues. Because of this, the films investigated and the case studies have been limited to texts that reproduce problematic representations of working class and ethnic minorities and issues of class and race in British

cinema - *Fish Tank* (Arnold 2009) and *This is England* (Meadows 2007). In order to form comparisons, there has been a detailed investigation of the work of Ken Loach, dividing his body of work into two distinctive parts. His pre and post New Labour films and how the political climate has affected the imperatives of his films. In regard to black British film, as we are discussing what is a small number of films, for reasons investigated in Chapter 2, there is a specific focus on *Bullet Boy* (Saul Dibb, 2004).

It is undeniable that the 20th century class struggles influenced the social character of the British New Wave, a film genre characterised by the depiction of working class individuals and the class conflicts that are created when this social group comes into contact with the middle class and social exclusivity. However, there has been extensive research already produced in relation to this period. Thus, a historical analysis of the cultural and political preconditions for its emergence and development was deemed unnecessary for this thesis. Further, the filmic ideas introduced in the 1980's, specifically the emergence of Channel Four and its film making arm, Film on Four, and the development of an anti-Thatcherite film culture in Britain have not been examined in this thesis for similar reasons. While the polemical nature of the distinctive film of this period, *My Beautiful Launderette* (Frears, 1985) exposed the paradox at the centre of Thatcherite entrepreneurialism by conceptualizing it within the class and racial nexus, the various ways in which Channel Four came to facilitate this *form* of British - filmmaking during this are explored within the chapter on black British filmmaking.

It is important to note that prior to this investigation, I had little involvement or specialist knowledge of what occurred in the British film industry other than the interest of an emerging screenwriter/director. I had not experienced personally any type of exclusion in the industry, and I did not possess anything more than a basic, observational understanding of the important issues and interwoven frameworks within the industry. For these reasons, I was a relative outsider in the world of British film. This was not regarded necessarily as a disadvantage though, as my position as a relatively detached outsider afforded me a unique position. However, it does prove ironic that while measures are being taken to help increase inclusion in film, I, as a black, working-class young man, felt the need to modify and restrain my behaviour still further in order to gain access. Further, the reality that a black, well-spoken but evidently working class and

moreover competent young doctoral student was treated with disdain by members of the British film industry and intelligentsia on several occasions throughout my research. I spoke volumes about the complexity of the issues surrounding social exclusion in the British film industry.

The choice of topic for investigation developed out of a personal fascination with the long-term changes noticeable in the social position of British cinema. My first initial research aim was to investigate why, despite the numerous schemes and programmes implemented by New Labour's Film Council, working class people of all ethnicities continued to be excluded or marginalised in British film, both in front and behind the camera. While this question was primarily related to the post 1997 discourse, I was disinclined to limit my investigation to this specific period. I became attentive to the possibility that a long-term developmental approach would help to uncover answers to questions that related to a relatively recent social issue. In this way, I focused on the long-term developments in British Cinema since the mid-late 20th century. Essentially therefore, the main motivation was to seek the roots of social exclusion and its effects on political and cultural discourse as an explanation for the changing degree of representation and the power struggles between social groups in which exclusion emerged, both in wider society and specifically in British film. In specific regard to black British cinema, this emerged nearly two decades before the actual New Labour cultural policies that informed British film industry emerged.

For the purposes of this investigation, over a hundred semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from various film-related associations and institutions, which represented what was felt to be a cross-section of the British film industry. The goal of these interviews was to obtain a detailed and thorough comprehension of the various ties of interdependence linking members of the British film figuration. Any particular organisation, group or individual that I felt had an important stake or role in British film, from the position of academic, practitioner or curator or bureaucrat, was approached for an interview. Thus, interviewees were purposefully and deliberately selected rather than through any random researching approach; the latter technique would not have been relevant in this kind of research.

## Chapter One: Beyond the Screen: New Labour, The Film Council and the Emergence of BBC Films and FilmFour.

This chapter sets out to examine the impact of the shifting political ideology surrounding British social realism and depictions of working class existence in relation to it. It will investigate the changes in political identity of the Labour Party and how this affected the triangulation that is politics, culture and its effects, and the role both BBC Films and Film Four occupied in this triangulation.

### British Film Under The Conservatives

Margaret Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister in November 1990. The post-war consensus that had embraced both the mixed economy and the responsibility of governments to bring forward social welfare was rejected during her 11-year reign in favour of an emphasis on free markets and individual freedom that privileged low taxation, deregulation, restrictions on public spending and the privatisation of previously nationalised industries (Brison, 2011: 12). This in turn was rooted in a belief in the virtues of competitiveness and individual responsibility that disregarded claims of social culpability for social problems, encapsulated in Thatcher's infamous statement that;

There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families (McSmith, 2010: 23).

From this perspective, state intervention to defeat inequality was both undesirable and economically dangerous - poverty was related to individual moral failings by the undeserving poor, rather than to economic structures and institutional relationships. This thinking relied heavily on the ideas of neo-liberalist philosopher F.A. Hayek, who condemned governmental attempts at social justice as corrosive of individual liberty (Brison: 2011: 15).

During the 1990s, the entire landscape of British film and television broadcasting changed considerably, both within a political context and in the broader mediascape. Firstly, the direct political pressure applied to the BBC from the Conservatives was reduced. This alleviation of pressure allowed the Corporation to become much more broader in their remit. This expansion

and diversifying of their remit shifted them into the direction of cinema, and the BBC began financing features in the form of BBC Films (Friedman, 1993:73).

Until the mid 1980s, Britain had mirrored the practice common to many countries in Europe of offering parallel support mechanisms for film as industry and film as culture, justified by a mixture of economic and cultural arguments. Film industry support was managed by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and its *modus operandi* was; regulations against anti competitive practices, implementing a national screen quota, a subsidiary for film known as the Eady Levy, and a specialised bank for providing film loans in the form of the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005:421). In regard to its cultural dimension, the main agent since the 1930's was the British Film Institute (BFI) whose responsibilities include managing the National Film Archive, delivering film education and operating the National Film Theatre (NFT). Crucially, they supported regional film theatres and financed low budget feature films specifically for their *cultural value*. These structures for promoting film as culture had developed over time, as a reaction to various pressures and imperatives and as a result, while funding and decision making frameworks were homespun, they emerged “more sensitive to the cultural value of film than any other bureaucratic system of governance could be” (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005:421).

This slow but continuing process of public intervention in British film was halted in 1985 when the Thatcher government dismantled the existing framework for supporting film-as-industry; the Conservatives abolished both the screen quota and the Eady Levy and replaced the National Film Finance Corporation with a private company, British Screen. However, this policy of industrial delegative leadership was abated and the new John Major government responded to the intense lobbying from within the film industry by reintroducing a tax concession and including film as one of the causes to be supported by the new National Lottery revenue. Further, industrial and cultural policy separation was remedied by moving the main civil services objectives for film from the DTI to the newly established Secretary of State for National Heritage, within the Department of National Heritage (DNH) (Dickenson & Harvey, 2005:421).

In 1992, the Tory Party under the new leadership of John Major won a fourth consecutive parliamentary majority. However, what was significant about this victory was the manner of the triumph - this majority was 21 seats, compared with 99 in the previous election victory in 1987

(McSmith, 2010:152). Despite the Labour Party having been marginally ahead in the opinion polls just prior election, the conservatives still obtained 42% of the votes cast, with Labour receiving only 34% (Abercrombe 2000: 427).

The increased focus by John Major's Conservatives on the development of employable skills in the 1990s had the effect of individualising what was a widespread issue experienced by millions of people in the country – the collective problem of unemployment. This was coupled with a social welfare discourse presented by the Conservatives in the 1980's, a culture of dependency, which implied that those in receipt of state benefits were afflicted with a psychological apathy, idleness and improvidence not present in the working population (Abercrombe 2000: 109). The actual structural dimension of the unemployment - that there are insufficient jobs in the economy- was translated into the problem and responsibility of the individual affected.

### The Re-Emergence of Ken Loach

This Conservative ideology was not challenged filmically in a way that paralleled the work of filmmakers in the 1980's, when a film culture was developed that was counter-hegemonic and critical of Thatcher's Conservative government and its policies in films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985, Stephen Frears,) *Letter to Brezhnev* (1985, Chris Bernard,) and *High Hopes* (1988, Mike Leigh). Furthermore, in the 1990s the representation of the working class in British cinema was characterised by a significant absence of political intent and adherence to any utopian ideology. However, the most political social realist film-maker of this period, Ken Loach, re-emerged, creating a body of key films that articulated the effects of what he believe to be undiluted, irresponsible government policies rooted in class conflict. Although the power of his political alignment within his films is fading, to understand the key elements of British social realism and its political shift, we must examine Loach's films from the 1990s, which focus on working-class people in contemporary British society. We will use the work of Ken Loach to identify and contextualise this shift by dividing his films into two trilogies; firstly, *Riff Raff* (1990), *Raining Stones* (1993) and *Ladybird Ladybird* (1994); and secondly, *My Name is Joe* (1998), *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) and *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004).

Ken Loach's return into feature film making in the early 1990's can be interpreted as the execution of a concerted, twofold strategy. This strategy was devised in reaction to being forcibly dislocated from the British TV industry (Hill, 1999: 255). During the previous decade issues of censorship and his alignment with oppositional politics in the form of the Great Miners Strike created a industry-wide belief that Loach was too much of a risk; his positioning on the radical left of British politics created a sense of him lacking the required balance and objectivity to be an acceptable television documentarist (Hill, 1999: 256). A number of his documentaries, including one relating to the Miners Strike were either decommissioned or withheld from terrestrial broadcasting until the films had lost all topicality and potential social impact. On a second level, his initial attempts to return to feature film making in the late 1980's were shackled as he appeared to potential financiers too much a risk to be a commercially viable director (Hill, 1999: 260).

Thus, Loach cultivated a new identity, remoulding himself as a European director and launched a career benefitting from a new international system of independent production and European co-funding. Thematically, the focus of his films was now on the effects of capitalist exploitation via the *global* system, as opposed to solely British capitalism (Hallam, 2000: 160). The aspect of social criticism in Loach's films certainly needs to be taken into consideration in an analysis of the current climate in British cinema. All his characters are prisoners of their class, income and social circumstances.

Films that hinted at such injustices as unemployment and social marginalisation were bound to only be popular amongst a left-leaning audience, especially on the continent, since he came to articulate real political, economic and social grievances. This can be attributed to the fact that his films alluded to genuine class antagonisms, pitting capitalists and the rich on one side of the social divide against the working class on the other. The second part of this concerted strategy was to make several relatively low budget films that remained local, and aesthetically linked to his early documentary dramas. However, the universality of his working class themes permitted the films to take on a greater significance beyond the UK (Fuller, 1998: 67).

Loach's international films were motivated by the implicitly international compass of a Marxist political outlook, in terms of which the working class



is a global rather than a national identity and all individuals are, in the words of Marx and Engels, dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world (Hill, 1999: 268).

In narrative terms, a typical Ken Loach film of this period will follow the downward path of a working class protagonist who, despite his or her best endeavours, is undone by exploitative, economic disadvantage articulated through the social institutions, such as the government services or schools, who function to assure the reproduction as opposed to the reduction of structural inequality. Specifically, the films focus on ordinary, working class and imperfect individuals attempting to exist within an unjust social system (Hill, 2000: 261). The formation (with Sally Hibbin) of Parallax Pictures in 1990, a small-left leaning company enabled Loach to continue the enlargement of his political perspectives. His first two films, *Riff Raff* and *Raining Stones* demonstrated that he could make films in England that were much more correlated to his political convictions without losing his commercial viability in Europe (Hallam, 2000: 172).

*Riff Raff* was produced as a feature film for Channel 4's *Film on Four*, which was established for the specific purpose of investing in British independent films with a theatrical distribution before being broadcast on television. Located on a south London building site, this film features casual workers converting a former hospital building into luxury apartments. Recently released from a prison sentence and homeless, Stevie (Robert Carlyle) secures a job as a casual labourer, also finding sub-standard accommodation in a semi-derelict council estate. Apart from the scenes between Stevie and Susan, the majority of the dramatic action takes place on the construction site. Larry (Ricky Tomlinson) takes up the role as the political activist among the builders, and attempts to collectivise the casual workforce (Wilson, 1991:61). Indicative of Ken Loach's political position and critique of the punitive measures Thatcher employed to reduce the threat of the 'Enemy Within', he is subsequently sacked for trying to create a union.

The observational style of Loach's shooting is evident in the distance between the camera and the characters. Throughout the film, the camera work consists of just two shots, alternating between either a medium or long shot. The initial conversation between Stevie and Susan at the advent their relationship, which would in normal circumstances be shot in close-up to emphasise emotional intimacy, is shot at a distance to create a sense of observation rather than involvement.

Further, the actors move in and out of a static frame and their dialogue is unstructured and at times drowned out by the crowd. With an aesthetic approach to cinematography that employs the use of natural light, these cinematic devices contribute to the creation of a naturalism that displays no artificiality or stagecraft (Hayward, 2004: 62).

Stevie is depicted as embodying the entrepreneurial spirit of the period in his attempts to transcend the limitations of both his class and criminal background by building his own underwear business. The gap between him and his girlfriend, the aspiring but unrealistic singer Susan is their approach towards achievement within the shifting society of Thatcher's Britain. Loach's critical treatment of the entrepreneur spirit ruled by a capitalist economy is illustrated by these characters; Susan's failure as a professional singer is a product of both her lack of work ethic and her lack of singing ability. Steve displays a much more disciplined approach to achieving success, but ultimately rejects his entrepreneurial ambitions, burning down the building.

*Riff Raff* is a polemic reaction to the socio-political change brought about by Thatcher's Britain and it is this political commentary that provides the controlling narrative of the film. Set in Thatcher's Britain of the 1980s, it makes clear references to conservative government politics, articulated in the character 'Tommy's speech on Tory housing policy and the growth of an undiluted entrepreneurial market. The film's location on a construction site is indicative of a British society shifting, demonstrated in the reduction of the welfare state towards a financially orientated economy supported by the casualisation of labour. This, in particular is presented in the absence of basic, on-site health and safety guidelines and the hazardous, unprotected working conditions the workers are exposed to.

*Raining Stones* follows a similarly linear main plot; unemployed father Bob (Bruce Jones) struggles to find the money to pay for his daughter's First Communion dress. Accompanied by his friend Tommy (Ricky Tomlinson) the story focuses on them devising numerous (and ultimately fruitless) money generating schemes. Bob's unemployment (his van, his only viable means of income is stolen at the start of the film) leads him to borrow money from an uncompromising loan shark, whose main business is drawn from the residents on Bob's council

estate. Bob's failure to meet the repayments results in a terrifying attack by the loan shark against his wife and daughter. Bob brings matters to an end when the drunken loan shark crashes his car and dies after a fight with Bob, who then steals money from his wallet as he lies dying in his car. Bob then runs into the church and confesses everything to his Catholic Priest, who persuades him not to turn himself to the police, convincing him that the Holy Spirit has forgiven him for his sin. Unlike many of Loach's films, the story has a more cause and effect closing; while at his daughter's communion we see a police siren approaching his house. However it is revealed to the audience that they have simply recovered his stolen van (Tuener,1993:50).

The film was shot on the Langley estate in Middleton, northeast Manchester. Loach uses real location from a moor where Bob and Tommy run after a sheep to get mutton, a pub where they sell it, the council estate they live in, the employment office, the night club where Bob gets a security job, and the cricket field from which they steal the turf for a client's lawn; all are interwoven into the main story to provide a realistic, detailed observation on the daily struggle for working-class people. Similar to *Riff Raff*, in *Raining Stones* Loach maintains a camera distance from the actors and places being filmed, with a fidelity to the use of an unstable visual aesthetic which uses medium close shots with the employing of long focus lenses. Bob's speech about youth unemployment, the *Socialist Worker* poster featuring as a backdrop in the frame as Bob and his father-in-law discuss his financial issues, and the stealing of turf from the bowling green at the Conservative Club all have obvious political resonances and these provide a much more acute description of the director's political position and possess more impact on the audience consciousness than Bob's individual, money generating scenes, which while presenting the daily vicissitude of working class existence, often seem trivial (Macnab,1995:163).

Critics repeatedly point out that the work of Loach shares the characteristics of the Italian neo-realist films, and *Raining Stones* is especially often compared with *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, 1948). Not only Loach's narrative and cinematic techniques to achieve authenticity (subject matter, non-professional actors, location shooting, lengthy takes), but also share alternating comedy and melodrama. Loach demonstrates filmicly how political discourses and policies have a detrimental effect on the lives of people on the periphery, through the narrative.

*Ladybird Ladybird* marries a less specific environment with a narrative structure that draws on melodrama (Leigh 2002:151). Maggie (Crissy Rock) has her four children taken away from her by the Social Services, due to the unstable home environment created by the violent relationship she has with her ex-husband Simon (Ray Winstone). On a night out she meets a Paraguayan exile Jorge (Vladimir Vega) in a karaoke pub. The film focuses on their developing relationship; they fall in love, start living together and have two daughters, although both of them are also taken in to care by social services who conclude that their relationship is not conducive for the children. We are given a sense that this is a docudrama by being informed at the beginning of the film that it is 'based on a true story'. The narrative structure of *Ladybird Ladybird* is much more melodramatic; time between events is reduced to condense their story into a hundred and one minute film and creates a much more dramatic, docudrama effect. Maggie's accounts about her separation from her children is incorporated into the story through a series of flashbacks within the progression of this new relationship, with Loach employing a 'voice-over' technique to emphasise Maggie's perspective (Leigh 2002: 151). There is substance in the assertion that *Ladybird Ladybird* can be compared to Loach's work in the 1960's. *Cathy Come Home* captured the same struggle of ordinary people against state institution (in *Cathy Come Home*, the young parents are also declared to be 'inadequate parents' by social services and face the prospect of their children being taken away). However, although in *Cathy Come Home* the cinematic devices employed are firmly rooted in a documentary aesthetic, by reducing the emotional involvement with the characters, *Ladybird Ladybird*'s flashbacks, married with Maggie's voice-over, clearly differentiates the narrative attitude of these two films.

The authenticity of experience comes from the film's proximity to Maggie (Macnab 1994: 14). We trace the important incidents of her life; her father's violence towards both her and her mother, her domestic life with her children (all from different fathers), the first encounter with Simon and having another baby, Simon's violence and her escape from him, her period in a women's refuge and an accidental fire which seriously injures her eldest son Sean, and her battle with social services in the aftermath of the incident. All this is presented through Maggie's perspective.

This identification with Maggie's experience works as a powerful melodramatic device, although the emotional impact of her experience makes the power of the subjective social analysis in this film less effective. However, Loach also redirects the emotional power of this film to disrupt and alter this identification. The film's close focus on Maggie also exposes her abrasiveness. In particular, in the court scene where it is decided that Maggie's children will once again be taken into care by the Social Services, her trust in the individual social worker and entire social system is betrayed. At this point, Maggie's efforts to be co-operative with the social services, and her diplomacy on the whole, prove futile, manifest in Maggie's anger and offensive language, in contrast with Jorge's composedness (Munro, 1994:12). This is in response to investing trust in an ideologically driven society which ultimately considers her through the prism of a class-biased perspective; that of a working class woman of "low intellect and little self control", who "has had a number of partners" and "puts her children at risk of violence".

Jorge, a political refugee from Paraguay, is, on the other hand, a marginalised immigrant in the UK; however, he is highly educated and political, and has an understanding in managing bureaucracy. Even after they endure the indignity and injustice of losing their first daughter, he is able to persuade Maggie to modify her behaviour in order to allow her to negotiate the social system and ultimately get their baby back. She is forced by political pressure to alter her personal characteristics in order to tally with the institution's expectations. Jorge's rational nature provides a clear contrast with that of Maggie's, whose desire for children seems much stronger than her rationality. However, they are connected in a common experience of state oppression.

*Ladybird Ladybird* provides us with a melodramatic narrative device by focusing on a female protagonist through Maggie's perspective and creates the conflict of the social victim against the undiluted systemic devices of an oppressive, autocratic society.

Given that class can be understood theoretically, in terms of the way capitalism is organised economically, these filmic investigations are descriptively powerful as a platform for the critique of wealth inequality, which has immense political relevance. The films give a clear perspective on political issues, communicated through the actions of the protagonist. The characters are not only the narrative centrepiece, but also announce the films political perspective. *Riff Raff*, *Raining Stones* and *Ladybird Ladybird* are strong reactions to the socio-political change brought about by Thatcher's Britain, and are specifically presenting the effects of this political change.

This forms the dominant narrative of the films; this is also a certain continuity from the anti-Thatcherite films of the 1980's. Loach's main imperative at this point is a critique of the British social system; exposing the flaws in the system which nevertheless operate in a manner which systemically oppress the very citizens the institutions are in place to assist (Hayward, 2004:5). Loach's commitment to Trotskyite Marxism, demonstrative in his films of this period, also differentiates his works from other high-profile British directors of this, or any other period in British cinema, and makes his position in British film culture particularly unique; he uses his characters to announce specific political points in order for the politics to insinuate itself in the narrative. This, coupled with his commitment to a naturalistic style of film-making derived from documentary cinema techniques; filming in locations without artificial lighting; using non-professional actors and improvisation in dialogue (Leigh, 2002: 18).

Loach sought to make film politically effective by creating cinematic events about situations of political oppression, often in northern towns, by asking those with direct experience of those situations and oppressions to participate in performance. His paramount concern was not art, but with representation and creating a consciousness. In terms of ideology they were explicitly Marxist, geared towards understanding social reality to the extent that they were discussing their way of life. Within his filmic practice, this involved coming into conflict with institutions, their concerns, what they were doing, and how they viewed their relation to the wider society.

### The Origins of New Labour and the Third Way

At this point, some notable changes were taking place in British politics that would prove to be detrimental to the progression of a politicised, social realist filmic approach in Britain. How the New Labour 'Third Way' project insinuated itself into British culture, specifically in film, must be examined through a number of interpretations and conceptualisations, beginning with an analysis of the New Labour project and its genesis. Precisely how we interpret it is the issue. What is unachievable is a general consensus position. We would struggle to find one beyond the claim that there was a huge ideological shift as a result of adapting a particular electoral strategy. We can find those who consider themselves to be socialist and hold the New Labour position,

and those that complicate it further by asserting that the Labour Party was never on the side of the working class, and simply assisted the bourgeois state to manage capital. Political scientists may describe it as pure electoral politics and making oneself more amenable to Middle England. But the shift must be understood in terms of class, and the disregarding of any kind of class foundation to politics.

From its inception, the Labour Party has always been a coalition of groups, with a range of visions and interests wrestling for priority. For much of the twentieth century, it was a party of the working class and the trade union movement, committed to eradicating poverty and the exploitation of the many by the few and using state power to achieve this end. From 1918 until the New Labour dawn this vision of social justice was symbolised by Clause Four of the party constitution which promised:

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and at the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership and the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service (Brison, 2011:2).

Some may argue that the New Labour project, simplified, was an answer to an inevitable problem; how does a social democratic party pursue its agenda in a society where class lines, identities and associations are less clear than they were a generation ago? The question that re-occurred was would Labour ever win again after 18 years of defeats and the changing composition of the working class, fragmented under Thatcher, and free market capitalism. In attempting to explain the rightward movement of the Parliamentary Labour Party in the last 20 years we must analyse exactly what condition the Labour Party found themselves prior to 1994. Before May 1, 1997, Labour had not won an election in more than twenty-two years and had not secured a significant parliamentary majority in over three decades. However, despite the apparent power of the Conservatives ideological position, by the late 1980's the Tories were experiencing a number of political difficulties and divisions that resulted in the forceful replacement of Thatcher by John Major in 1990, and that appeared to present the Labour Party

with an unexpected chance of electoral success. Neil Kinnock had introduced a series of new reforms including the expulsion of the militant tendency, a weakening of the Party's fidelity to redistributive taxation and an undiluted acceptance of privatisation (Brison, 2011:4).

This change in party identity, according to those at the Labour centre ideologically, was not driven by politicians of any side, but by underlying social change; the rise of the consumer society, increasing numbers of white collar jobs, the broadening of property ownership. And from this position the policies that increased these trends such as the 'Right to Buy' under Thatcher were trends that existed anyway, brought about by the structural change in society. This created a problem for the Labour Party. Traditionally, it had been a moderate social democratic party. It contained a more ideological wing, but it was controlled by moderate trade union leaders, backed up by a fairly conservative working class electorate. In addition, the height of predictable class based voting i.e. middle class people voting Tory, working class people voting Labour in the UK took place in the early 1950's. Since then there had always been a downward trend. Instead voters of all classes were more likely to be open-minded and vote for the party or candidate that appeals to them before the election. However, as the working class supporters drifted away, at least as active members, the party became increasingly controlled by middle class activists who were ideological in nature. This is what occurred in the 70's and 80's and led Labour into the wilderness. From the Labour centre, the solution to this, started by Neil Kinnock and then continued by John Smith and now Tony Blair, was to bring control into the centre, in order to cut out these supporters from the decision making process (Anstead, N: 2012). However, a fourth election defeat in 1991 suggested to many in the Labour Party that electoral success required a much more drastic form of modernisation and a complete reassessment of its central principles.

The Commission for Social Justice, set up in December 1992 by John Smith, offered a critique of the method of social justice being pursued, arguing that economic prosperity was the best guarantor of social equality (Rawnsley, 2001:22). This process of ideological renewal was a significant development which sought to challenge perceptions of the Labour Party. This historical position was underpinned by a view that social equality and wealth distribution could



be achieved through increased welfare spending, financed by progressive taxation and sustained economic expansion through Keynesian demand management (Cruddas, J: 2011). Labour challenged such a model, arguing that adherence to such an ideology was no longer electorally or governmentally tenable (Brison, 2011:8). The Commission for Social Justice placed a reformed vision of social justice at the core of their strategic thinking. Central to this thinking was reconsidering the principles of social justice and its relationship with other economic and social goals and policies. These were identified as:

The equal worth of all citizens, their equal right to be able to meet their basic needs, the need to spread opportunities and life chances as widely as possible and finally the requirement that we reduce and where possible eliminate unjustified inequalities (Brison, 2011:7).

From this perspective, the way forward did not primarily lie with either an unregulated market economy or a redistributive tax and benefits system. Rather, it required an investment in welfare to promote the skills and opportunities that would enable individuals to manage their own lives. The language of the Commission also represented a decisive shift away from the idea that inequalities are a product of an unjust class society and in the direction of a new idea that individuals should be given opportunities and responsibilities *within* the existing structures of society (Craig, 2008: 66).

From the moment Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party in 1994 and rebranded it as New Labour, there existed a universal assumption that he would win the General Election. New Labour promised not only an end to 18 years of Conservative government but also a new era of social justice based on contemporary need conducive to what they believed to be a shifting British society, rather than old ideology rooted in the party's past. Its manifesto stated

We are a broad based movement for progress and justice.  
But we have liberated these values from out-dated dogma  
or doctrine, and we have applied these values to the  
modern world (Rawnsley, 2001:18)

Targeted holistically at the voters of middle England, the rebranding of Labour included the removal of Clause 4, which became the lynchpin in the whole strategy of 'modernisation',

although it was Blair himself who replaced Clause Four's commitment to public ownership, stating;

The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us as a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few (Brison, 2011: 5).

Reforms within the Labour Party represented a strategy to attract votes from the middle class. Policies to modernise the party involved less tolerance of dissent from the Labour left, ideological movement towards occupying the centre of British politics, and distancing the party from the trade unions (Abercrombe 2000: 427).

The Labour government was dubbed 'New Labour' because it set out to reform social and economic institutions through a 'Third Way' programme that attempted to bridge the neo-liberalism of the previous Conservative government, with Tony Blair insisting that the old Labour left must 'modernise or die' stating that:

Our task today is not to fight old battles but to show there is a third way, a way of marrying together an open, competitive and successful economy with a just, decent and humane society'(Abercrombe, 2000: 439).

The winning majority in 1997 was the biggest in Labour's history and the biggest for any party since the Second World War. However, what is significant is that the turnout for the 1997 General Election was the lowest since 1935. Fewer than one in three of the potential electorate voted for a Labour candidate. Blair had secured a parliamentary majority of 179, but with half a million fewer votes than at the previous general election. New Labour's share of the vote was 43.2 %, lower than both Atlee's share in 1945, and Wilson's in 1964 and

1966. It was even less than in the three elections of the 50's that Labour lost (Rawnsley, 2001: 13).

However, there are other reasons than ideological reform why the British electorate thought that the Labour Party was much more likely to manage the economy more effectively. The Conservative Party imploded in its fourth term, under John Major, and by the mid 1990's the key markers of their Thatcherite strategy had disintegrated. This was aided by an administration that was considered to be incompetent and corrupt; the Tories were viewed as being internally divided, and the aftermath of the humiliating expulsion from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in September 1992 (Black Wednesday) resulted in them losing their reputation for economic competence. Thus, there was an expectation that Labour would win by a considerable margin (Bilson, 2011:32).

New Labour sought intellectual credibility from a number of contemporary writers, and Blair's guru in these matters was Anthony Giddens, who famously coined the term the 'Third Way'. Giddens argued that the massive global social and economic changes had undermined the foundations of both neo-liberal and social democratic thought (Giddens, 1998: 22). This, he said, made it both possible and imperative to develop a 'third way' approach, a philosophical position that coupled social democracy's commitment to social justice with the requirements of the capitalist system. Self - actualisation by the individual will benefit society as a whole. In this sense, *individual* social interests were being advanced simultaneously. Blair attempted to usher in Giddens theory by arguing that:

The third way stands for modernized social democracy, commitment to social justice and the goals of the centre left, but flexible, innovative and forward looking in the means to achieve them. It is founded on the values which have guided progressive politics for more than a century – democracy, liberty, justice, mutual obligation and internationalism. But it is a third way because it moves decisively beyond an old left preoccupied with state control, high taxation and producer interests, and a new right treating public investment and a new right treating public investment and often the very notion of society and collective endeavor as evils to be undone (Bilson, 2011:22).

This claim for the Third Way meant that New Labour could combine the best of other political traditions. New Labour brought together the economic reforms of Margaret Thatcher and combined them with social solidarity (Abercrombe, 2000: 311). Giddens also attempted to reconcile the structure–agency dilemma with his theory of ‘structuration’. A simple encapsulation of this intellectual influence at work was Blair’s ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’ soundbite, which attempted to reconcile both an agent and structure approach (Anstead, N: 2012). But in practice, as with the Third Way, it ended up around one pole of each opposition – more neoliberalism than solidarity, more tough on crime than any causes (Wayne, M: 2012).

We can take the view that New Labour purported to become a classless project, but we could articulate the very same view about numerous socialist tendencies. Certain sections of the Labour Party prior to Blair took the same position. However, while we could trace a socialist politics of classlessness beyond New Labour, Tony Blair became the first Labour leader to articulate this as an ideological view. Centralist New Labour commentators would not describe the project as specifically about creating a classless society and many may claim that it is a term that is more closely associated with John Major's Conservative administration. However, what New Labour rejected holistically was the idea of inherent class conflict as the basis for contemporary politics. It can be argued that in taking this approach, New Labour were wholly consistent with more historic ideas within the Labour movement, especially those found within the revisionist movement led by Tony Crosland. The central tenet of revisionism is that the great economic battles had been won in the mid-20th century, and that the more benevolent form of capitalism this created allows equality to be pursued *within* the prevailing capitalist environment (Leach, 2011:153). During the New Labour tenure, economic growth meant that politicians could manoeuvre around issues of class through public services. It was a classic demonstration of revisionism in that the class interests could be reconciled by economic growth; social change could be regulated within the capitalist environment (Cruddas, J: 2011). Social engineering by means of centralised policy became the central tenant of Labour’s modernisation. Thus, New Labour’s social democracy manifested itself in micro-policies, either to help people move up the social ladder (such as the expansion of the university sector) or to alleviate poverty (i.e. tax credits). Accepting and extending the neoliberal strategy, New Labour attempted to marry it with

a state welfare modernisation programme based on the notion of social inclusion. To overcome deepening social divisions, Labour proposed not so much a redistribution of income or wealth but a redistribution of opportunities. Whereas the Labour Party has historically considered social welfare as a pivotal means of redressing inequalities arising from capitalist system, New Labour embraced free market capitalism and redefined inequality as social exclusion from the financial and social opportunities capitalism could bestow (Abercrombe, 2000: 440).

In its undiluted acceptance of the central tenets of capitalism, New Labour presented the idea that there was no alternative to the existing hegemony. Britain remained fundamentally a capitalist society. By this we mean;

- There is private ownership of the means of production (property, plant, machinery, ect)
- Economic activity is geared to making profits
- Profits go to the owners of the means of production
- Workers generally do not own productive property but work for wages
- The processes of production and sale of goods and services are organised into markets, transactions are commodified (Abercrombe: 2000: 441).

It is indicative of the ideological shift of New Labour that *The Financial Times*, self described as a 'natural supporter of the Tories', also committed themselves to the New Labour project. In addition, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), not an admirer of previous Labour governments, praised an 'excellent start' aiming to maintain stability and foster long term growth while seeking fairness and developing human potential, manifested in Gordon Brown announcing an additional £1.2 billion for the health service and £2.3 billion for education (Rawnsey, 2010: 49). More indicative was Tony Blair receiving the blessings of former Labour leader Michael Foot, whose pro nationalisation 1983 Election Manifesto was dubbed the 'longest suicide note in history' and marked the last time that Labour would dogmatically pursue an overtly leftwing agenda when trying to win power.

Central to the New Labour project was its branding, public perception, and presentation and

disguising of their policies, with New Labour indicating to the working class that no one could be worse off under them than they had been under the Conservatives (Rawnsey, 2001: 110). Specifically, Chancellor Gordon Brown's first budget was a change to tax credits that intended to make entry into the employment market pay off by ensuring that it was more financially rewarding to be in employment, albeit on low income, than to remain on state benefits. In effect, the public purse was subsidizing the employers who would not pay a living wage. The right wing press praised the budget for its ideological shift from previous Labour budgets by encouraging enterprise, entrepreneurship and relatively low taxation, while the left wing press praised the budget for its centre-left approach in presenting a benevolent form of capitalism in which they permitted the speculative practices in the City while helping the less well-off. The budget also gave cash increases of £200 million to education and 500 million to the National Health Service (Abercrombe, 2000: 158).

There was still a desire amongst a large section of the party for a more avowedly socialist government which paid more respect to Labour's history and spent less time seducing middle Britain. However, the pursuit of equality, along with the pursuit of capitalism, was the fundamental base of action to promote social change Britain throughout the New Labour tenure. This preoccupation meant that those left wing activists within the Labour party were vulnerable to the appeals for Labour party unity. This encouraged them to reject working class industrial militancy if and when that might endanger the long-term success of the party.

Employing the power of the media for political purposes was embraced by New Labour's founders, and a closer knit group around Blair and Brown, including Alistair Campbell and Peter Mandelson adopted a deliberate strategy for managing the presentation of their policies and ideologies (the performance Tony Blair gave in the wake of Princess Diana's death, particularly in his selective addressing of her as the 'people's princess' can be interpreted as a concerted attempt to co-op all parts of society into one group). As Norman Fairclough argues in *New Labour, New Language* (2000) this was the first instance of a UK political party treating the presentation of their policies as part of the actual policy making process (Brison, 2011:6).

We must now consider the language of New Labour in relation to class. Politicians of the New Labour government preferred to appeal to the individual rather than to a particular class, and inequality was now being framed as social exclusion rather than a question of class. But labels like ‘ordinary,’ ‘hard working’, were euphemisms for class, still locating people in the social hierarchy without engaging in direct class reference (Runnymede, 2009: 51). In many ways, contemporary political science would identify this description as a truce with the Conservative party on class politics, with the argument framed around risk adverse politicians seeking to minimise losses and thus gravitating to a relatively small portion of the centre ground. However, it was more than a truce. It was recognition of its own defeat in class terms and a form of surrender. The Conservative Party had never stopped believing in class warfare. However, New Labour did think it was the case so brought an end to that form of language. It was a capitulation; a total shift in the conceptual frameworks of New Labour. The term ‘social exclusion’ became a way of articulating certain social positions without referring to class. This is relevant to examining the ideology and semantics of filmic texts. This includes the question of whether and to what extent filmic texts can have inherent meaning or whether all visual meaning is negotiated between the practitioner and the audience.

### The Politics of Culture: New Labour and The Creation of the UK Film Council

When conceptualising the role of New Labour, manifested in the Film Council, in the de-politicisation of social realism, what we are dealing with is the question of cultural agency and structure – how much can individual politicians and governments shape cultural institutions and structures, and how much do filmic practitioners react to them? I will approach this issue from the structural side, that cultural institutions were reactive to the political circumstances they found themselves in. As we have seen, from the late 1990’s onwards, some notable changes took place within the wider figuration of New Labour policy that impacted the British film industry, making the whole system of its governance and organisation more complex, and increasingly outside of the realms of control by any single governing body. The most notable developments included the increasing focus on film development and the new commercial influences in British film, for example, the emergence of BBC Films, Film Four, and the

establishment of the UK Film Council.

Art and culture in general became a subject of political interest for New Labour, suggested by a number of developments on a national scale, and these influenced policy objectives across most national governing bodies of art, media and popular culture. Following the 1997 election victory, the New Labour government's first Culture Secretary Chris Smith announced the project under the name of 're-branding UK', to transform its national image from the national heritage culture to 'cool Britannia', which was intended to represent Britain's creative industries. Theatre arts, fashion, design, music, and films; all of which could be co-opted to constitute the main body of the UK's creative re-branding.

Film policy was one of the areas in which New Labour intervened rapidly and decisively when it came into government. New Labour's economic and cultural arguments became manifest in a certain dualism in film policy, whereby the government tended to support film via a rationale associated with trade policy – protection and subsidy – and partly by forms of patronage associated with cultural capital via policy. Both sets of concerns were executed in relationship to the nation, considered as a political entity. Discussions of film policy, past and present, revolved around three main themes; that Hollywood dominated the market, that the film trade has distinctive *economic* features, and that the film trade has distinctive cultural characteristics (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 420).

From 1997, New Labour followed the trajectory taken by the Major government by keeping film within the DNH though renaming this the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Support for film production was increased via tax relief and the National Lottery. In addition, a policy review group was appointed and its first publication, *A Bigger Picture*, marked a further amalgamation of culture and commerce through the proposal to create a single, unified body to administer all aspects of British film. The emergence of the UK Film Council (UKFC) signalled the intentions of the British government to not only emphasise access based around equality for all, but to apply neo-liberal, market principles to film production and culture in general. British film development from the late 1990's was influenced by this trend to a considerable extent. Within its first 100 days of the new administration, New Labour had appointed the first Minister for Film, permitted Channel Four to spend more on film making and introduced a hundred per



cent tax rebate scheme for production (Murphy, 2000: 43). This focus on film industry modernisation was in relation to the government's broader industrial policy. The concerted shift towards a more export orientated film industry demonstrated the privileging of large entities that compete against each other under the international market.

In cinema, this resulted in a populist, large budget approach, as opposed to a low budget film culture articulated around contemporary social issues (Murphy, 2000: 46). However, Chris Smith's successor, Tessa Jowell, would later criticise this approach, envisioning a much more moderated culturally orientated strategy in an essay titled *Government and the Value of Culture*, published in 2004. Here, she defended arts funding on much more cultural grounds:

“public subsidy produces what the market may not sustain – it is almost a bulwark against globalised commercialism that might not be sensitive or responsive to local and national cultural expression” (Jowell, 2004:5)

A key new development emerged as a result of National Lottery resources being made available to arts activities in the mid-1990s. At its advent, this funding was managed by Regional Arts Associations across the UK, and this included large awards to groups of film producers organised in franchises in England. However, as this model of funding attracted industry criticism, a number of government-led working groups were convened and submitted their recommendations for a new, centralised system of funding for British film. The New Labour government announced its intention of doubling the share of UK box office for British films. In July 1997, the New Labour Government created a new tax relief, a 100% first- year write-off for the production of all films costing £15m or less. The effects of this tax relief took some time to be implemented but eventually proved to have a very significant impact on levels of domestic production (Nelmes, 2007:79). The New Labour government began a holistic reconstruction of the film funding structure, actioned under the umbrella of a new institution. In July 1998, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) announced its intention to establish the Film Council. What was being proposed was a UK wide body with the chief purpose of ensuring public funds were strategically invested in British film. The UKFC assumed control of the work carried out previously by British Screen Finance, the British Film Commission (BFC), the

National Lottery Film Department of the Arts Council of England and the English regional arts associations. (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005:422).

At the time, there was a strong possibility that the BFI would lose its independence and become absorbed in the new structure, but its charitable status, royal charter and public membership framework allowed the BFI to retain a degree of autonomy, although the majority of its public funding would come through the UKFC which acquired control over its board - level appointments. In addition, the UKFC exercised its supervisory powers by relieving the BFI of two key functions that would later prove fatal to the continuation of an authentic, British social realist film culture; support and funding for experimental film production and the responsibility for non-commercial and non-mainstream regional film exhibition (Dickenson & Harvey, 2005: 422). The UKFC had two overarching aims:

- To develop a sustainable UK film industry
- To develop film culture in the UK by improving access to, and education about the moving image.

Following the appointment of film director Alan Parker CBE as its Chairman, the Film Council was established on 2 May 2000. *Towards a Sustainable UK Film Industry*, the manifesto released at its launch, was the first public statement of the Film Council's industrial, financial and cultural aims and initial funding programme frameworks. The New Labour Government set 13 goals for the UKFC, which were to:

- Provide leadership and guidance for the industry
- Act as an interface between the industry, its representative bodies and the DCMS
- Promote film activity in the nations and regions and ensure that national and regional bodies work in concert to contribute towards the UKFC's goals
- Improve education about the moving image
- Extend and improve access to film culture and film heritage, serving the diverse geographical needs of the UK's nations and regions, and recognising the differing needs of rural, suburban and metropolitan locations
- Support innovative film-making, to develop film culture and encourage creative excellence and nurture new talent

- Support and encourage cultural diversity and social inclusiveness
- Help maximise inward investment
- Help maximise exports
- Attract more private finance into film in order to catalyse the emergence of new structures
- Improve the quality of British films and ensure they receive appropriate exposure
- Promote and encourage use of digital technology
- Help ensure an adequate supply of skills and new talent.(Film Council, 2000:10).

The UKFC thus took ownership of almost all aspects of publicly funded film production, distribution and exhibition, establishing a variety of national production funds and programmes to assist in the development, production, distribution and exhibition of films. The sense of a cultural framework for film in England was effectively diminished, and replaced by the very different imperatives of an essentially industrial and economic strategy. Further, the cost of administering this new public policy for film increased dramatically. This new regime was managed by nine Regional Screen Agencies (RSA): Screen East (East of England), EM Media (East Midlands), Film London (Greater London), Northern Film and Media (North East England), Vision+Media (North West England), Screen South (South East England), South West Screen (South West England), Screen West Midlands (West Midlands) and Screen Yorkshire (Yorkshire and Humberside).

These RSAs were established and funded by the UKFC in economic partnership with larger regional development agencies (RDAs). Significantly, like the UKFC, these screen agencies were created as *private* companies, operating principally with public revenue but with a very limited public accountability. The policy priority for the agencies, under pressure from the commercially orientated RDAs, was to enhance business and employment opportunities and inward investment and as a consequence, the socio- cultural dimension of work produced, incompatible with a holistically commercial framework, was significantly marginalised. Further, there was the tendency to see the American - dominated commercial sector as the horizon of significance. Thus, the priorities of the RSAs moved public policy away from socio-cultural criteria and towards an exclusively market based form of commissioning, production, distribution and evaluation (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 423).

National Lottery money became the major source of funding for film, distributed by the UKFC, which had three key funds with the objective of developing writing, directing and producing for film: the New Cinema Fund, the Premiere Fund and the Development Fund:

- *The Development Fund* aimed to raise the quality of UK screenplays through development and support initiatives. The fund supported single development projects, slate funding deals with companies who have successfully responded to open tenders for business and creative proposals, and the 25 words or less scheme, which offers 12 writers each year a fixed sum of £10,000 to develop a first draft script in a specific genre. The annual budget for the fund was 5 Million (Murphy, 2010:25).
- *The New Cinema Fund* aimed to finance films that could potentially appeal to a broad range of audiences. The fund supported feature films from script stage; pilots; shorts; feature-length documentaries. In addition, the fund provided completion and promotion money for feature films and Warp X, the low-budget feature film scheme. 5 Million pounds was allocated for this (Murphy, 2010:25).
- *The Premiere Fund*, with an annual budget of 10 Million pounds, assumed a creative and business role in the production of feature film, from the development of projects to marketing and distribution across the world. The fund aimed to invest in popular, commercially viable feature films. Its objective was to play a pivotal role in assisting the development of sustainable British film businesses capable of long-term growth. The fund was particularly committed to establishing strategic involvement in talent-driven projects from European producers (Murphy, 2010:25).

In addition, *The Film Training Fund* with a budget of £1 million a year was created to support training for scriptwriters and development executives, and separately to train business executives, producers and distributors. According to the Film Council, the main groups excluded from the British film industry were ethnic minorities and those from lower social classes, with the combination of these features, i.e. ethnic minority adults and youths, presenting their biggest challenge and also their largest target group for increasing film participation. It is argued here,

however, that to understand the issue in these terms was of only limited use. It presents the issue in a very monolithic way and also supports dichotomous systems of thinking by conceptualising the problem in terms of white vs. ethnic minorities, as opposed to middle-class vs. working-class.

### Culture Versus Commercialism: BBC Films and FilmFour

For us to understand exactly how New Labour ideology insinuated itself into British cinema, we must now investigate the output from the two national institutions responsible for film production in the UK; BBC Films and Channel 4's FilmFour. Firstly, we must examine the genesis of these institutions relationship with government, as the relationship's capacity to influence the industrial and regulatory context in which the BBC in particular must operate is critical to understanding the neoliberal frameworks that shaped British film from this period.

At this point, we must consider the political character of the BBC and its constitutional status. The BBC's very existence has relied from its advent on a Royal Charter, renewed every ten years and subject to parliamentary review of its performance. The Charter specifies the BBC's objectives, functions and financial operations. Further, the BBC is a public corporation overseen by a board of governors who operate as trustees to ensure the safeguarding of the broadcasting service in the public interest. Crucially, the board of governors are appointed on the recommendation of the government. Thus, the renewal of the Charter, the make up of the board of governors and its very financing are dependent on the State, demonstrated by the regulating of the level of licence fee and any additional income generating activities, all subject to State approval (Born, 2005:32).

There were a number of crucial factors that ushered in neoliberal market principles in the BBC. The most important motivational force was the action of the government in the late 1980's in an attempt to introduce more competition and 'deregulation' into the economy. As far as British broadcasting was concerned, the main policy changes were the removal of certain restrictions on ownership, the loosening of some of the rules governing the output of commercial television stations and moves towards the commercialisation of terrestrial television. The Conservative

government's attention had turned to breaking the duopoly of the BBC and ITV, in an effort to improve efficiency and reduce costs. To force this efficiency, the government reduced the BBC's finances, granting a much smaller increase to the license fee than the BBC had expected and indexing the license fee to general inflation, a lower rate than inflation within broadcasting. This was further compounded by starting this indexation from a lower baseline than the BBC had requested. The result was by the early 1990's there was a significant fall in the real income of the BBC (Born, 2005:50).

In addition, the *Peacock Report*, commissioned by the Tories in 1987 had at the time resisted Thatcher's desire to fully commercialise the BBC. However, some of its key findings became the foundation of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, which would serve to apply these Thatcherite desires into both Channel 4 and the BBC, albeit indirectly. The report recommended that licences for the ITV regions such as Thames, Yorkshire, Granada and London Weekend Television (LWT) should be awarded on the basis of competitive bids in an auction rather than being allocated on the basis of the quality of the proposed services. Applicants had to bid a sum to the Treasury for what they deemed the franchise contract was worth each year in a 'blind auction', with the winner determined by the applicant who bid the highest value. This led to fears that applicants would bankrupt themselves, or offer cheaper programming so as to be able to finance the bids. To introduce competition in advertising, Channel 4 should sell their own advertising, and to stimulate competition between broadcasters, the BBC and ITV should buy at least 40% of their programming from independent production companies.

The modus operandi of the Conservative government in relation to the BBC was demanding efficiency in the use of public revenue, but as a result of the escalating costs and a plateaued license fee revenue, there was a need for the BBC to increase the volume of programming but committing fewer financial resources to production. These external factors and the BBC's own resource audit in July 1991 indicated that the BBC's critical mass exceeded its production need – remaining over-resourced was no longer a viable option for the BBC (Born: 2005, 70). In addition, new commercial radio, cable, and Rupert Murdoch's satellite television entrants took an increased audience share from the terrestrial channels. This placed financial pressure on the existing broadcasting companies to re-assess their expenditure. In particular, LWT head Greg

Dyke had discovered that, like the BBC, they had no idea of the monetary cost of running individual departments. Thus, each part of the business was to be operated as a profit-centre in its own right.

It was essentially these principles that New Director General John Birt established at the BBC. In response, Birt introduced a controversial internal market system called Producer Choice. The idea behind Producer Choice was that each part of the BBC would be run as a profit-and-loss operation. Programme producers requiring external broadcast units would be responsible for purchasing them from their own allocated budget, to be obtained either from the BBC or from the commercial sector. BBC Producer Choice was officially launched at the end of 1991 as a "new way of managing resources" (Born: 2005:73). At the launch, Birt explained that under Producer Choice, BBC resources would be managed so that producers would have the right to negotiate resource provision themselves, spending both internally or externally. In situations where the money was denied to any internal resource as a result of these negotiations, the internal department would fail to break even on its targets or resource utilization. Further, if the situation could not be remedied within a year, department closures and redundancies would follow. As the Tories were unable to privatize the BBC, Producer Choice represented the closest ideological step to this, by establishing a 'market' inside the BBC (Born: 2005:73). It was the fruition of the cultural revolution that had been threatening the BBC from Margaret Thatcher in the 1980's, embracing internal market principles as part of a quid pro quo exchange for the alleviating of political pressure.

However, Producer Choice was regarded by many inside and outside the BBC as an ambiguous measure that created the apparatus and the preconditions for privatising parts of the BBC should it prove to be politically opportune. As the 40% independent quota began during the 1990's, government policy analysts proposed in the name of efficiency and clarity to fragment the BBC into its component parts so that they could trade transparently with each other and in the international markets. In this context, Birt's restructuring transformed the BBC in the "image of the neo-liberal recommendations" (Born, 2005: 133) and by the late 1990's the group effect of these developments was to install a culture of undiluted entrepreneurialism throughout the BBC, manifest in all areas of its operations, from its programming to its film policy.

However, commercialism was not holistically governed by economic imperatives. It rooted itself in the collective consciousness of those working for the BBC. In the early 1990's they created a number of external taskforces. One was titled '*BBC The Entrepreneur*'. Its report reveals the political expediency behind the wholesale adoption of the vernacular of entrepreneurialism;

Beyond the needs of the consumer, there is a need to run with the political tide. Entrepreneurialism was a requirement of the 1980's and will still have an important part to play in the public sector in the 1990's (Born, 2005:52).

As a result of their continuation of Thatcherism, New Labour found it difficult to articulate any positive image of the public sector. When it espoused values of community and social responsibility, New Labour conceived public institutions only as a simple variant of business. In this context, when the public sector acts it must function as if it were a business or in partnership with business; and if it is not working, the remedy is to subject it to the disciplines of private management and the market (Born, 2005: 8). Such developments and the increasing emphasis on competition and efficiency must be considered in relation to the wider politics of New Labour's neo liberalism. While advocating the public service broadcasting model, because of the vicissitudes created by the coexistence of a globally successful public media giant alongside powerful private media interests, New Labour's Culture Minister Chris Smith was driven constantly to interject in the operations of the BBC. His interventions seemed motivated by the principle that the BBC must be moderated to allow space for the private sector to expand its profitability, with concerns over competition taking priority over the continuing viability of the BBC. In effect, the New Labour government was attempting to cultivate a 'public media model that would transcend the prevailing neoliberal discourse' (Born, 2005:10). During the nineties, with the reducing real value of the license fee and pressure by the government, the BBC developed its commercial activities with the objective of augmenting its income, now operating as a mixed economy of public service and commercialism.

In the early to mid 1990's the BBC Drama group was an enormous, multi-sectioned department spanning the most popular BBC Drama, with an annual budget of 200 million (Vir, P:2012). The group consisted of four London based departments; Serials, Single Plays, Series and the Films



Unit. For the BBC, the political message being telegraphed from New Labour was that it was required to become more commercial and international in its approach. In response, co-production and co-financing deals rapidly became established as standard practice, with individual departments now able to negotiate with international broadcasters for co-production finance. As costume dramas and heritage films attracted more co-production money, this growing reliance on the co-production model eroded both the British identity of drama, and more crucially, writer/producer autonomy and the capacity for risk taking.

It was specifically in the Single Drama (Singles) department that the risk adverse editorial tendencies were most manifest. With the effect of reduced staff and financial restrictions, Singles faced intense pressure to justify this strand of drama and ensure its commercial viability. The response to this pressure was to re-establish itself in theatrical film. Following government initiatives to expand and commercialise the industry, British film was primed for expansion in the late 90's. BBC Films began to co-produce between five and ten features a year, and by the end of the 90's Singles had absorbed the film industry's orthodoxy, rising budgets, theatrical releases and distribution (Born, 2005:355). This was largely influenced by the success of Channel 4's recently established FilmFour Productions, which in effect took the channel's feature film arm, Film on Four, away from the mainstream of the channel, becoming a stand alone business.

Channel 4 was launched in 1982 as a national broadcasting service. Although it was funded entirely from commercial revenue, the channel was not simply committed to public service broadcasting in abstract principle; it was required under the 1981 and 1990 Broadcasting Act to cater for the tastes and interests of audiences not served by ITV or the BBC, to demonstrate innovation in the form and content of its programming and to dedicate a proportion of their airtime to educational programmes (Channel Four, 1994: 3)

Unlike other existing television channels that created most of their programming in-house with their own staff and facilities, Channel 4 was mandated from its inception not to produce its own programmes. Instead, Channel 4 was specifically required to acquire its programming from external sources, with a substantial proportion from independent producers, through a then pioneering process of *commissioning*. This commissioning structure allowed even the smallest

production companies the opportunity to win a major commission, provided the channel both wanted the idea and had confidence in the producer and his or her practitioners to deliver it. Further, the independent production companies did not need vast resources to prepare the project prior to its commissioning; neither was there a requirement for resources for deficit financing as in television industries (where the producer can only recover cost and make a profit with subsidiary sales) (Channel Four, 1994: 4). Specifically, the reliance on the independent production sector also encouraged Channel 4 to pioneer a new hybrid link between television and film, so that the channel could support feature films that could be seen via theatrical release first, gaining both kudos and financial return before their terrestrial premiere on the channel's *Film on Four* slot.

*Film on Four* was a feature film slot based mainly on co-productions, created by Jeremy Isaacs at Channel 4's advent and run by David Rose, who occupied the role of Head of Fiction. This represented the continuation of his work at the BBC. Under Rose, a climate emerged that was increasingly conducive to the production of films critical of Thatcherism (Hobson, 2007:37). Notably, he had created the space for socio-political drama in producing the BBC's *Play for Today*, which became a training ground for directors such as Mike Leigh and Ken Loach. *Film on Four* films were both a reflection of and in opposition to the prevailing culture. Films like *My Beautiful Launderette*, *High Hopes* (Leigh, 1985) and *Letter to Brezhnev* (Bernard, 1985) can be defined as anti-Thatcherite films that were critical of the way in which society was moving. *Film on Four* commissioned about 15 films per year, many of them with co-finance from other partners and some fully funded by the channel, with the average budget of about £2 million, and the channel's contributions at 40%.

The Independent Film and Video Unit, run by its Commissioning Editor Alan Fountain and later Stuart Cosgrove, was a unique department within Channel 4 and had a long and admirable track record commissioning a wide range of documentaries and low budget dramas. The important emphasis was on the word *independent*. The department encouraged programme makers and filmmakers who worked within an independent cultural tradition, through political conviction and cultural difference. In particular, flagship programmes like *War Cries* became a strand for social and polemical films. Beyond this strand, they were able to dedicate a small amount of money towards independent feature films, with the vast majority of the department's allocation

for films with cinematic release spent in co-production with the BFI, with the produced films also gaining terrestrial premiers on Film on Four (Channel Four, 1994: 4).

Film on Four's focus was on feature films designed for theatrical release, although they also commissioned television films. What was significant at this time was that, in keeping with their remit, they aimed to 'provide a clear contrast with ITV, the BBC and the American Studios' (Channel Four, 1994:4). Further, they were explicitly clear that they were not interested in commissioning 'stories about the Second World War and costume drama – usually because they are too expensive' (Channel Four, 1994: 4). However, on arrival at the channel in 1987 replacing Isaacs, Michael Grade was sceptical of *Film on Four*, believing it did less for the channel and simply contributed to nurturing the ailing British film industry. Further, he considering film as vanity publishing through expediency, there to make the channel look good rather than boost ratings. He observed for instance, that *My Beautiful Laundrette*, though a tremendous hit, did not get a terrestrial screening until early 1987 and returned a disappointing £4,000 from US distribution deals (Brown, 2007:189). In addition, figures showed that audiences for film on Channel 4 had halved between 1987 and 1991.

Michael Grade's arrival marked the beginning of a change in ideology within Film on Four, manifest in the appointment of David Aukin, who joined the channel as Head of Drama in Autumn 1990, following four years as the Executive Director of the Royal National Theatre. This drama department was responsible for films and single plays, serials and series. However, he also became the Commissioning Editor for Film on Four. In 1993, three of these films, *The Crying Game*, (Neil Jordan, 1992) *Howards End* (James Ivory 1992) and *Damage* (Louis Malle, 1992) between them won an unprecedented number of Academy Award nominations, three Oscars and three awards at Cannes Film Festival. And in 1994, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, 1994) became the most commercially successful British film ever.

From its inception until the end of 1992, Channel 4 was operated by the Channel Four Television Company Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and its successor, the Independent Television Commission (ITC). The channel was funded by a subscription levied on the ITV companies, amounting to 13.6% of the previous year's advertising revenue on both commercial terrestrial channels. As a quid pro quo exchange for this subscription, the ITV companies had the right to sell airtime on Channel 4 in their own franchise

areas (Channel Four, 1994:6). When Channel 4 was instructed to sell its own airtime under the 1990 Broadcasting Act, a very limited safety net was constructed to meet fears that it would not be able to attract enough commercial revenue while also fulfilling its distinct public service remit (Channel Four, 1994:6). Channel 4 launched a campaign against the funding formula of this Act, as the believed the safety net was a redundant insurance policy. The funding formula provided that in the hypothetical situation that the channel attracted less than 14% of total terrestrial advertising and sponsorship revenue, the first call would be upon the channel's own reserves, but if they were exhausted, the ITV companies would be required to make up any shortfall to the maximum of 2% of the total revenue figure (Channel Four, 1994:6) During 1996, Channel 4 faced the new threat of being privatised by the Conservative government. We must again consider the political economy that Chanel 4 existed in; triggered by the 1990 Broadcasting Act, the channel became a *statutory corporation*, in effect owned by the Treasury (Brown, 2007:193). Thus, the Government had dismissed Channel 4's objections to privatisation because the payments Channel 4 made to ITV would ensure that ITV would provide a limited guarantee in the event that the channel's advertising revenue reduced.

In the wake of John Major's implementation of policies to keep the British film industry afloat, we must now investigate further how the New Labour government managed the "continuing American dominance of the British market" (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 424). On 3 July 1996, Michael Grade wrote directly to Tony Blair, then leader of the Labour opposition, declaring his opposition to the privatisation of the channel, emphasising the potential danger of being taken over by both European and wider international broadcasters with the introduction of new digital services, notably Rupert Murdoch (Brown, 2007: 200). It is notable that since that point, three Labour manifestos have included a commitment not to privatise Channel 4 during the life of that government (Brown: 2007: 201).

The cultivating of a relationship between New Labour and Channel 4 would come to fruition just weeks after Labour's landslide victory on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1997. In the following negotiations between Chris Smith and the Independent Television Commission (ITC) Smith had stated that the channel's programme remit could not be guaranteed under any future shareholder structure. However, removing the payment agreements between the channel and ITV would create extra

resources to enable Channel 4 to be much more competitive in the market. This moderated form of neoliberal deregulation was one of the key points in Chris Smith's negotiations with the ITC, stating that in return for dismantling the channel's financial cushioning from ITV and fully exploiting its advertising potential, the channel must demonstrate a major commitment to the British film industry, giving preference to innovative, commercially viable projects, and further exploiting the international market. This shift was further compounded by Michael Grade's comments in 1997, when he argued that the public service remit that the channel had subscribed to from its advent was out-dated and that in effect, neoliberal commercialism "could be synonymous with the innovation central to the channels remit" (Born, 2005: 483). This rested on the New Labour Third Way ideology that a commitment to public services could be achieved within capitalism. The continuation of this - started by Chris Smith - was to bring neoliberalism into the heart of the channel. Within Channel 4, this was the New Labour project and its purpose. This change in the channel's identity was driven not just by social change, but by New Labour politicians, brought about by a structural change in its economy.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1997, Michael Jackson joined Channel 4 as Chief Executive, leaving the BBC. He began dismantling the existing staff structure at the channel, bringing with him a number of commissioning executives from the BBC. This marked the beginning of a holistic shift in the entire ideology of the channel, moving further away from the core principles of its original remit and the personnel who implemented them. Long serving commissioners such as Farrukh Dhondy, Head of Multicultural Programing, were replaced by BBC staff like Jasmine Anwar (Brown, 2007: 214). New Labour were also eager to appoint their own people in key positions at Channel 4. Vanni Treves, a city lawyer, was headhunted for the role of Channel 4 Chairman on the premise that Chris Smith was looking for people without specific experience in the media but experience in corporate governance, running difficult organisations in the law firms and industrial companies (Brown: 2007:217).

Channel 4 were under explicit directions to expand by New Labour to tally with the neo-liberal discourse. The government had made a surge towards digital television the key point in its media policy and expected the channel to conform. The question was now what content could fill the new digital channels. Jackson had identified *Film on Four* as one of its potentially strongest products, so Jackson reviewed the scheme for a subscription FilmFour channel within weeks of

his appointment. The objective was to reach as big an audience as possible and maximise the number of subscribers. In a joint venture, FilmFour Productions, the film - making arm of the channel - was established as a separate company, FilmFour Limited, in May 1998. The subscription rate was set at £5.99 a month. By Christmas 2009 it had 250,000 subscribers.

The chief aim of the newly branded FilmFour was to make fewer but bigger budgeted films, doubling the investment and attracting international co-production, with a commitment to achieving commercial success in America. Chris Smith demanded that the “smaller, small budgeted UK films had to be perfect to succeed” (Brown, 2007: 237). What was meant by ‘perfect’ was transposing a specific, cultivated image of Britain, and shifting away from the polemical films that had characterised *Film on Four* in the previous decade. Ultimately, a film will reflect the subjective interests of the people that commission them. Channel 4, especially *Film on Four*, had previously adhered to a specific ideology coupling left wing commissioners with practitioners of radical opinion. By this stage however, most of these commissioners had left or been replaced by a wave of BBC staff, and a whole new approach to commissioning took place. Paul Webster was recruited from Miramax to replace David Aukin as Chief Executive. Having previously been a producer at Working Title, where he headed their Los Angeles office, the emphasis was on films with high production values and a crossover appeal that could attract both American co- production finance and distribution.

The New Labour government were much clearer about the economic goals of film policy than the film’s cultural virtues. Chris Smith highlighted the role of these industries as a growing part of the economy, noting that these combined sectors generated revenues of nearly £60 billion a year, contributed to 4% of the domestic economy and employed over one million people. This he argued, with an internationalised market strategy, could create numerous opportunities for providing ‘cultural goods and services’ (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 423).

## The New Labour Ideology Within British Cinema

Within the New Labour/UKFC nexus, projecting the nation through cinema became much more persuasive in this period through the value of *cultural specificity*. It is in this broader context that cinema was seen by New Labour to make a contribution to the public sphere, where difference of experience and could be amalgamated. However, it is argued here that the execution of this objective was administered by film company executives whose concerns were not indexed with the national audience (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 420).

By 1999 the British film industry was now swollen with funding by the £17 million annual National Lottery contribution to the UKFC. The modus operandi of the three main sources of funding – Film Four, the BBC, and the UKFC’s Premiere Production fund, were in tandem with the mandate for New Labour’s Britain – the funding of substantially profitable films with high budgets, completely against the grain of social realism (Murphy, 2009: 21). If we can define a British film as a film entirely shot and funded in Britain and in the main produced for British consumption, the BBC, FilmFour and the UKFC were not necessarily interested in British cinema *per se*. As funded by the government, they were obliged to produce an essentially Americanised version of film that conformed to the interests of both their paymasters and their potential American co-production targets. Screenplays were required to attract both US and UK financing and star casting, with a narrative structure to tally with the doctrines of American script gurus like Robert McKee, Syd Field and Linda Serger (Murphy 2009: 24). However, in 2002 FilmFour folded after just four years in operation with losses of £3m in 2000 and £5.4m in 2001. These may have appeared to be minimal amounts in Hollywood terms but it represented a substantial enough loss for the Channel 4 board to close it down; it had cost £20 million to start and by 2002 had lost a total of £14.8 million (Brown: 2007, 236).

Blairism invoked a classless society operating, paradoxically enough, through the hegemony of middle class values. In this context, working class identity re-emerges in only a small number of films from this period, when also considering that this was a period when domestic production figures were particularly high in comparison to the 1970’s (Kirk, 2009: 19). The films in the 90s showed two tendencies; the gender anxiety of male characters and the New Labour Third Way

politics of rebranding the UK (Murphy: 2000: 278). This created the trend of the combination of youth drug culture and pop music within film and is followed by films such as *Twin Town* (Kevin Allen, 1997), *The Acid House* (Paul McGuigan, 1998) and *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan, 1999). However, *The Full Monty*'s (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) cheerfulness and comical characters also gathered audiences to *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000), another feel-good story from north England's disintegrating mining towns. *Billy Elliot, Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996), and *The Full Monty* are three prime example of projecting this new national image that the New Labour government implemented. These three films share the admiration of the bourgeois creative industry, integrating the elements of a London-centric industry into the story of unemployed, hopeless, traditional (linked to heavy industry) working-class people. The subject matter of social realism was absorbed and transformed into a cultural commodity within a global capitalist market. Further, it found diversity in its identity through devolution, which made the hegemonic term 'British cinema' no longer cohesive (Kirk, 2009: 197).

In *Billy Elliot*, we can associate the interest in escape and individualism with the New Labour project of the formation of the bourgeois subject. In *Billy Elliot* it is the responsibility of the individual to require the knowledge and skills that his liberation requires. From this perspective, middle class values are esteemed, and his working class existence, presented in the form of his unstable family against the backdrop of the Great Miners Strike is simply relegated to a dysfunctional distraction from the man aim. This is indicative of the New Labour emphasis upon individualism and de-traditionalism, as well as the rupture with conceptualisations of collective class-based cultures. Notably, it's the young working class individual who occupies the central focus of this working class narrative of refashioning. Billy is the exceptional individual amongst the working class heathen who can only express himself outside the stifling confines of his enclosed working class community. What is expressed in the film is that working class is not a culture that is fertile and can nurture, and the good, desirable, true life must surely lay elsewhere. It recodes the escaper paradigm to suit postmodern times, to convey the New Labour message of meritocracy as the films overriding ideological point of view.

*Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) clearly captured the zeitgeist, the fantasy of a passable class barrier. The wish to escape ones class is linked to an obsession with aesthetics, lifestyle, and



more generally with social and surfaces such as clothing and lifestyle, clearly portrayed through the mise en scene of this film. *Trainspotting* ended up, unwilling to provide an all embracing critique of the system in place, reducing the political to a mere personal problem, and then even further to a simple moral dilemma. The protagonist's immoral acts were more clearly defined in the film than the actual politics of the society, absolving the audience of socio-political enquiry. However, director Danny Boyle explains that while there was no political alignment to the film, he was still attempting to bring forward a form of social enquiry.

Social Realism is a very loose term. *Trainspotting* can still be considered in those terms but its subjective. You could have got Ken Loach, Mike Leigh, they all could give you a different treatment of Irvine's story. But with their films they are looking into a working class experience. I already know it, I've lived it. I'm trying to get out of it. And it's through hedonism, drugs, sex, alcohol, that's how people often try to get out of it (Danny Boyle, 2011).

Heavily influenced by the incoming post-welfare New Labour, *The Full Monty* came to epitomise the new feel-good, entertaining conception of social realism. *The Full Monty* was produced for £3.5 million and made £51 million in the UK and \$48.8 million in USA. In an effort to generate money, unemployed steel worker Gaz (Robert Carlyle) rounds up a group of men from an unemployment club to transform them into a male stripping group, despite their lack of talent, experience or an absence of the physical features required for such work. Unlike *Brassed Off*, a similar comedy themed film about the decline of British industry and its effect on a working class community (with a much more sincere treatment of the issue) *The Full Monty* possesses no such political subtext. The film suggests that it's self-respect that is absent from the men's lives. The white male working class was shown to have diverted their hope from regaining political and economic power to restoring themselves and their communities through a kind of homosocial cohesion, manifested in the performing arts (Kirk, 2009: 199). Further, John Hill adds that;

The film may be seen to hold out the possibility of overcoming the

crisis of masculinity, less by a re-learning of male roles than by the re-establishment of the bonds amongst men, particularly those associated with traditional male, working class culture" (Hill 2000: 185).

The phenomenal transatlantic Box Office success of *The Full Monty* and *Trainspotting* was partly a result of co-productions with powerful U.S. distributors such as 20 Century Fox and Miramax and the massive budget on marketing emphasising them as comedies and stylish youth films. Specifically, *Trainspotting* is an excellent example of collaborating with contemporary British pop music, which, in 1990s, was called 'Britpop' and gained a worldwide reputation. Significantly, these three films employ the use of British pop music (although *The Full Monty* uses 1980's music and *Billy Elliot* has a 1960s retro soundtrack), and ultimately the characters achieve their solution to their impoverished life styles by achieving employment within the creative industry. In particular, in *Trainspotting* the central character Renton monopolises the cash generated from drug dealing to escape Edinburgh and move to London, Britain's creative capital.

In capitalist society where the security of personal ontology is fragile, music generally serves as sites of nostalgia for a more homely place, a better place; a utopia" (Wayne, 2002: 292).

Political meanings in the specific context in the films are demolished and hidden in the globalised international economy. These film's solution to the crisis is found in the far fetched, trivial, unrealistic and unsustainable; male stripping, ballet, brass band participation and unadulterated hedonism, and all employ the linear, cause and effect ending. Instead of providing a class-consciousness and a political perspective, they provide a narrative of searching for an alternative and a utopian way to recover the traditional working-class community and masculinity which was dismantled by unemployment in the previous decade, caused by the economic shift from industrial manufacturing to the service industry and a reversal of the gender role. This representation of the working-class (male) community rather than class politics was also connected to the issue of commoditisation of the underclass. Crucially, their unemployment or drug culture was pathologised, presented as a subculture, a behavioural product, not a socio-political issue (Monk, 2000: 278).

While not possessing any kind of political alignment, *Nil by Mouth* (Gary Oldman, 1997) develops a dark tension between the working-class couple and has a quite extreme, violent representation of an abusive husband wrestling with his inner demons. While not a trained filmmaker, Gary Oldman's direct knowledge of the working class provided the authenticity to this depiction of the demographic. This was achieved by the film's unsteady cinematography, extreme closes ups and location shooting, all created an immediacy to the film and its themes. This extended the boundaries of cinematic realism, and at times distorted the line between documentary and a work of fiction (Lay, 2002: 28).

While audiences were exposed to this most extreme depiction of working class brutality in *Nil by Mouth*, the British film industry held a new enthusiasm for social realist films. In 1999 Vanessa Thorpe wrote an article for *The Guardian*, titled *Reality Bites (again)*, heralding the new renaissance of British socialist films by young directors operating (with success) in the European film festival circuit.

As every one of the more successful British productions shown in Cannes this month has paid deliberate homage to the hard-bitten tradition of social realism (Thrope, 1999).

Beside favouring the films of well-established British directors like Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, there were a developing number of films gaining acclaim at European film festivals including *Nil by Mouth*, *The War Zone* (Tim Roth, 1999), *Wonderland* (Michel Winterbottom, 1999), *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999), and the emerging films of Shane Meadows. In addition, the documentary-maker Powel Pawlikowski's feature film *Last Resort* (2000), a story of a Russian woman and her son who come to England to apply for political asylum achieved a reputation as a highly aesthetic film, while continuing a realist style through the use of a hand-held camera and location shooting.

## Changes in Ken Loach's Approach to Social Realism

The late 1990s saw a further development in the relationship with European film production in terms of production and distribution. The co-operative financing of low-budget films became more commonplace after the establishment of FilmFour. European funding organisations such as Eurimages and MEDIA financed many of the internationally recognised British films such as *Land and Freedom* (Ken Loach, 1995), *Secret and Lies* (Mike Leigh, 1995), and *The Pillow Book* (Peter Greenaway, 1995) (Cousins, 2000: 174). This establishment of UK-European co-production, provides another critical dimension to the conceptualising of the decline of social realism during the New Labour period, and at this point, we must now return to the work of Ken Loach to measure the semantic shift in social realism. It was this European recognition, initially through festivals and later through this funding model that permitted not only Loach to re-emerge, but to find a new audience for his films. His second trilogy, beginning with *My Name is Joe*, marked the continuation of Loach's collaboration with the screenwriter Paul Laverty, who had first worked with Loach on *Land and Freedom* (1995).

It was a tale about the way life is in Britain's cities  
today (Kitson 1998: 14).

Joe Kavanagh (Peter Mullan) is an unemployed Glaswegian recovering alcoholic who is managing a local football team for unemployed youth in the city, with a particular interest in one of the players, Liam, and his wife Sabine and four-year-old son. A social worker from the health centre (Sarah) who encounters Joe when she visits Liam and Sabine, becomes involved in relationship that leads to becoming pregnant with his child. However, Joe becomes embroiled in a drugs deal in his efforts to extricate Liam from his involvement with the local drugs baron McGowan, to whom Liam and drug addicted Sabine owe money (up until this point she had been forced into prostitution by McGowan to pay the debt). Sarah finds out about Joe's criminal dealings and brings the relationship to an end. In a desperate bid to resolve the matter, Joe attempts to quit the drugs job, has a fight with McGowan and his gang, and having now lost Sarah, returns to drink in desperation. In his drunken state he is unable to help the despairing

Liam who, with no was of evading McGowan's gang, hangs himself from a window in Joe's flat (Williamson, 1998: 58).

We can interpret *My Name is Joe* as a key point in Loach's semantic shift of social realism. Consistent with his other films of this decade, Loach casts regional, Glaswegian actors/actress in this film as part of the process of establishing authenticity of performance. Authenticity in this context can be understood not only their dialect and vernacular, but also in the sense of the life experience of the fictional situation that the non-professional actors project onto the screen. Loach has articulated the importance of including non-trained actresses to achieve the sense of realism.

People like Anne Marie bring their three-dimensional world into the film. They are the experts and they tell me how it should be. They become part of the film, almost like a documentary, weaving their real lives into the story (Kitson 1998: 15).

The personal, lived experiences of these actors (Mullan has a father who was an alcoholic) create the 'parallel between the role and their lives' (Bazin 1971: 24). Melodramatic elements here, as in *Ladybird Ladybird*, encourage the audience's sympathy and identification with the characters, through the melodramatic tensions created by class difference. But this class difference is also what tears them apart. When Sarah discovers Joe's involvement in the drug business, she brands Joe as a 'drug dealer', associating Joe with children who have been physically and mentally damaged by drugs; her point of view is completely rooted in her role of a social worker, specifically in her field and one who tries to protect children from drugs. Her attitude and morality about the drug business and its meta-effects are holistically positioned in middle-class behavioural values and notions of the drugs trade and its relationship with criminality.

*Sweet Sixteen*, set in Glasgow, tells the story of 16 year old Liam and his battle to extricate both him and his mother from their turbulent life with her abusive, drug dealing boyfriend, via his own involvement with the local drugs baron. Loach presents Glasgow as a city suffering from economic deterioration and endemic drug problems. Loach explores the relationships of Liam with his friend Pinball, his mother Jean, his older sister Chantelle, and the gangster Douglas.

However, the character (and his problems) seems to exist outside any institutional frameworks. There is an absence of social workers, and his non-inclusion in the education system is unexplained. What the film does focus on is the isolated situation of a teenage boy with these relationships, which effectively shape the choices he has to make. Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian* points out that:

Compston's Liam is heart-rendingly naïve in his assumption that once he has got enough drug money, he can abandon the trade and live with his mother in a vaguely imagined bucolic bliss in this caravan"

(Bradshaw 2002: 16-17).

The New Labour rhetoric of an emancipated British identity lead social realist films into a new subject-matter, that of ethnic minorities. Although the British Asian community was already on the screen in the 80s, *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) presents a comedy of a mixed marriage and their children's antagonistic attitude toward their fathers culture in 70's England. In the same way, Ken Loach tackles a contemporary Romeo-Juliet form of love story *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004), but this time it is not the class difference but the difference of ethnicity that is the obstacle (Murphy, 2009: 141). In *Ae Fond Kiss*, Loach relies on an interracial, cross-cultural relationship as its central plot. But in contrast to his pre- New Labour work, *Ae Fond Kiss* concentrates on a religio-cultural division. Casim is attracted to a white music teacher even though he is involved in an arranged marriage; has a fiancée. During their Spanish holiday, they discuss their opposing religions, but this represents a simple, trivial conversation between lovers, and reveals none of the real life concerns posed by cross religio-cultural relationships; there is nothing political. *It's a Free World* (2007) on the other hand, does hint at a fidelity to a social realist tradition with adaptation of this new subject matter; economic migrants and its relationship with the capitalist system. Throughout the film the audience witness Loach's accusation on the unjust system of global capitalism that draws its victims into an identical hierarchical system of exploitation.

Ken Loach's quintessential cinematic devices remain intact. He retains a fidelity to the use of an observational shooting style, with the camera keeping its distance from the characters or objects, while the use of hand-held cinematography contributes a documentary aesthetic to his films. He

continues with the minimal use of music and non-diegetic sound effects and developing an authentic and naturalist film aesthetic to portray the working class, through the employment of regional talent and non-professional actors remain central to his stylistic approach. Aesthetically, all these factors combine to provide each film in this second trilogy with a distinctive, documentary approach. Further, his constant stance against authoritarianism can be clearly seen in his description of social workers and the British police, in *Ladybird Ladybird*, where they are represented as unsympathetic bureaucrats disconnected from the vicissitudes of the working class experience.

However, while Loach's naturalistic approach remains, manifest in the mixture of professional actors and non-actors, the use of regional vernacular and location shooting in natural light to deliver a realistic *mise-en-scène*, what is in contrast to the films of the initial trilogy is that Loach exposed in his films the vertical relationship between the government and the working class, a relationship that deprives them of agency. And within this approach, Loach was willing to be indifferent to the box office. However, the political conflict within Loach's second wave of films has clearly withered. It is argued that his recent films like *Looking For Eric* (2010) and *The Angels Share* (2012) are stories that show working class life that is tough but offers no enquiry into the state institutions that are constantly making that life arduous for his protagonists. The political institutions that shaped his character's actions are no longer a central feature in the narrative. While Ken Loach's characters have always charted the erosion of the working class, he does not sentimentalise the plight of the characters. His characters decisions are not simply just a matter of personal morality but forced upon them by the socio economic situation (Kirk, 2009:182). The working class characters behaviour, good or bad, are simple products of the socio-economic situations that they are located in. However, these economic situations, previously manifest in the relationship with the characters and the state institutions, is a continuing absence in Loach's films (Hill, 2007: 182). We can attribute this to the compromises that Loach makes when developing his projects with his production company, Sixteen Films. UKFC, the BBC and Film Four, the three main sources of funding for Loach's films (along with his European funding) no longer allow such transgressions as direct class conflict with the state institutions in their films. What we experience is a moderated version of political engagement.

Another key factor is also the reliance of Loach on his screenwriters, and it must be stated that

the scripts penned by Jim Allen “incorporate a higher degree of political argument” (Kirk, 2009:183). However, the decrease in political alignment manifest in Paul Laverty’s scripts is symptomatic of more than just individuals – the shift from Allen to Laverty also represents a generatio - political shift, even though Laverty is clearly politically committed to progressive causes (Wayne, M: 2012). Loach’s contemporary social realism does not seek to reform any particular oppressive political system as such. This social realism stays above the fry of socio-political and ideological conflict, and hence, can command the guilty applause (and patronage) of the liberal middle class press and film inteligencia. But this approval comes at a cost. Loach’s social realism now promotes the division of political decision-making and its effects on society. Filmicly and conceptually, films shift energy and intention away from thinking via visible political and institutional frameworks and into the socio-cultural domain in which social inequality is defined by delinquent behaviour, cultural abstractions and financial improvidence. Ken Loach films drew its power from its association with the political left. His paramount concern was not art, but with representation and creating a consciousness. However, he now fails to bring his social concerns and his damnation of the government policies that shape the oppressive frameworks of the public institution to the centre of his films.

### New Interpretations of Social Realism

The importance of the depiction of working class characters in British cinema and their subsequent depoliticisation during this period provides an indication of what was transpiring politically. With the advent of a new era of filmmaking in Britain, the filmic responses to both the American film market and New Labour’s political influences became manifest in the portrayal of the British in film, negotiated between a depiction based upon an Americanised notion of Britishness and working class characters either framed around escapism or demonstrating the very worst behaviour of the criminalised British ‘underclass’. Thus, working class existence emerges in popular consciousness not with any particular accuracy, specificity of detail or political alignment, but through the conceptualisation of a particular strand of behaviour. Apparent working class behaviour is so exaggerated that the actual reality of the



conditions that create this behaviour is either ignored or distorted, but ultimately of no paramount concern.

The political ideology that had penetrated the nation was met in film by a notion of working class masculinity devoid of potency. The previous cinematic treatment of the proud, upstanding working male was replaced by an irresponsible, violent, casually racist, improvident working class male, and this became firmly established as a new character in British cinema. In *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* (Guy Ritchie, 1998) *Love Honor and Obey* (Dominic Anciano, 1998), *Gangster No. 1* (Paul McGuigan, 2002) *Snatch*, (Guy Ritchie, 2000) *The Business*, (Nick Love, 2003) *Outlaw* (Nick Love, 2007) *The Football Factory* (Nick Love, 2000) *Sexy Beast*, (Jonathan Glazer, 2000) *Rise of the Footsoldier*, (Julian Gilbey, 2007) *Green Street* (Lexi Alexander, 2005) and *London to Brighton* (Paul Andrew Williams, 2006), the working class male became a violent caricature of working class criminality, relocating the working class in the pubs, clubs, football stands and council estates. While these films ask questions about the civic activities and roles and relationships between working class individuals, their narratives never delve into the deep causes of the issues they raised. The working class is reconfigured within the spectacle of middle class entertainment, defining this identity through criminality, eroded housing, unemployment, imprudence and negative morality (Monk, C: 2000: 156).

Though the filmmakers of the 2000s did not holistically ignore the social problems of the day, their conceptualisation of working class existence was deeply influenced by wishes of the government via the film industry, who did not want the audience to look too deeply into the causes of poverty, inequality and criminality, let alone seek a remedy. Contemporary social realism is limited to those things that are, at least conceptually, compatible with the hegemonic political system. One can depict someone behaving in a certain way. But this leaves us with a fairly short scope for potential *political* debate. Social realism of this period straddled these two approaches; it sought to present us with a host of extreme social ills and anti-social behavioural choices of the working class and ethnic minorities, while leaving the antagonistic political systems and the systemic structures that usher in these ills intact. It is within the concept and the framework of critical concern summarised above that we will now investigate the films of two contemporary British filmmakers whose work, on the surface, appears to represent both working class characters and issues; Shane Meadows and Andrea Arnold. It will be revealed how the

aesthetic style of these films develop while corresponding to the subject of social realism, and how these three examples symbolise the depolitisation of the genre.

### Case Study: *This Is England*

*This is England* (Shane Meadows, 2006) is a semi-autobiographical film based on Meadows' experience during his childhood in the East Midlands. Meadows attempts to create an understanding for the racism of his characters. Speaking retrospectively, Meadows explains his own involvement with far right politics that formed the basis for the story;

It's very easy to see what can happen when you've got 3 million people on the dole and right-wing politicians start doing talks in town halls and everyone's looking for someone to blame. Don't get me wrong, I didn't sign on the dotted line, but I did sit and listen to these people and was thinking: Maybe this is the way. I was being told that people were sneaking into the country on boats and were living 50 and 60 in a house. I knew no better (Shane Meadows, 2007).

*This Is England* is a coming of age story about a young boy (Shaun) who, in a quest for acceptance, becomes involved in the far-right activities of a racist gang. Symbolism is a key device employed by Meadows to emphasise the loss of innocence and the sense of belonging Shaun is in pursuit of. When Shaun accepts the Union Jack from Combo, he is without realizing it also accepting not just the friendship, acceptance and sense of community that the gang offers; he is also embracing the principles that Combo represents: the far right politics of the National Front and a violent hatred of immigrants. The level of this hatred however, is oblivious to Shaun at this stage.

Meadows claimed that *This Is England's* objective was "to repulse people against violence and racism", attempted by constructing its narrative around Shaun's point-of-view. However, this extracts all critiquing and condemning of the racism of the period. Combo and his racist gang's abuse towards Pakistani boys on the street and the violent robbing and vandalism of a local newspaper shop run by another Pakistani immigrant are all represented not as vitriolic racial

abuse unacceptable in any circumstance or time period, but as a casual rite of passage for their new recruit. The true meaning of the racism is concealed by the innocence of Shaun, his liberation, his sense of belonging, and his admiration of the older gang members. The scene in which Combo racially abuses and violently attacks Milky finally brings both the film and Shaun back to reality and the issue of racism; however, considering the conversation between Combo and Milky just before the incident regarding Milky's family, it is an attempt by Meadows to create a sense of ambiguity to Combo's far right politics and racism. In this context, it appears his racism comes purely from his psychological complex toward Milky's stable domestic situation, forcing Combo to violently exorcise the demons from his own dysfunctional background, almost mitigating his behaviour. However, the speed in which we are taken from Combo socialising with Milky, racially abusing him before beating him almost to death, and then the instant sense of remorse appears unrealistic and lacking in plausibility.

The film places itself in 1983 through the employment of media footage of the politics of the time. In the opening scenes, iconic footage from the 80's such as the Rubik cube sensation, Margaret Thatcher, and crucially, the Falkland's War footage, creating the context within which the story takes place (the protagonist's father is a soldier in the war) These are edited in sync with The Smith's "*Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want*". This marrying of visual and audio stimuli is used to transport the audience back to the early 80's, contributing to the nostalgia of the mis-en scene. There does exist an alignment between Meadow's filmmaking aesthetics and classic social realist traditions. However, his use of historical film footage to provide a sense of place and time, the deployment of music and the varying camera techniques, weaving in and out of traditional social realist cinematic devices gives his films an almost fantasy quality. While at an aesthetic level *This is England* appears to depict the socio-political condition of the 80s, *This is England* contextualises itself by its depoliticised narrative, with the only indication of a politics integrating itself in the film occurring in the opening scenes in inserting highly political news footage of the 80s. This straightforward technique to establish realism works with his use of 80s music as a soundtrack. Meadows' style towards film-making; location shooting, local non-professional actors, working-class subject matter; is all as consistent as that of Loach, alongside his standing as a regional independent film-maker. However, what remains in contrast is Meadow's commitment to the visuals. His use of slow motion, monotone colour and metaphorical shots allows the film to further develop the subjectivity of protagonist. However,

by setting the film as a story of a boy in search of belonging, Meadows dilutes the level of political themes that the film presents. In *This Is England*, while the character of Shaun brilliantly symbolises the innocence that can be endangered by others during difficult economic periods, Shane Meadows work is testimony to the predicament of a filmmaker who appears anti establishment but lacks any well-defined ideological alternative in the current climate.

### Case Study: *Fish Tank*

*Fish Tank* presents 15 years-old Mia (Katie Jarvis), who is fed up with living with her sexually promiscuous mother and younger sister on a council estate in Essex. Her unsettled emotion towards her family leads her into a sexual relationship with her mother's boyfriend whilst developing a rather delicate bonding with Billy (Harry Treadaway) at a traveller's caravan site. *Fish Tank* is filmed in the Mardhouse Estate. *Made in Dagenham* (2010) was another film that was released during the same period, both depicting working class characters in the same region. One has a nostalgic, romantic notion of the British working class existence. *Fish Tank* however, is about the disintegration of the working class and of housing stock. The housing becomes an actor, affecting the patterns of acting. Paralleled with *Made in Dagenham*, here are two films seeking to depict a working class existence within a generation, disenfranchised through Labour.

*Fish Tank* is not completely unendurable. The film sets out from the social and geographical content dear to Ken Loach's earlier social realism; the disappearance of the working class, the crippling of a family through unemployment, the harsh climate and the presentation of the people, and the redemptive elements to the film. The state of Mia's face is used to help the audience comprehend where the story is within the timeline. Arnold consistently employs close-ups on the characters to draw visual attention to the protagonist's emotional state. The scenes of the new, low-rise housing complex that Mia and her family inhabit serve as significant moments in the film in the creation of an aesthetic contrast of *mise-en-scène*.

So why is *Fish Tank* so mediocre? So disconnected from reality? The problem is in the communication, and the process of its storytelling imperative, which is lacking in affective reality, intention and intensity, reducing the film to the level of liberal scapegoating of the white working class. In addition to the quality of the narrative, we will need to focus on the way the issue are framed, the *mis-en-scene*, and the premises followed though. The conflicting elements, as well as the imperatives of this kind of cinema, constitute the main problem in relation to this film. The subject matter seems convincing as a denunciation of Britain's working class and its apparent moral decline. The cause of these ills are not investigated, since class conflict remains outside the filmic space, and beyond what is acknowledged in British political sphere.

*Fish Tank's* approach provides a series of huge disadvantages in the context of the working class in the public consciousness. It enables the audience to immediately blame the victim, not the perpetrator, of any social disadvantages that could be brought up for debate. Poverty can be blamed on the poor and unemployed, pregnancy on the young and feckless. The problem with the depoliticised displays in social realism is that it creates a notion that can be reproduced forever, and in that fashion giving it the appearance of truth simply by the power of its repetition when filmic evidence fits already entrenched preconceptions. Disadvantage, in this sense, is a behaviour-based component. Women who cannot afford to have children should not have them. People who can work should do. Young children should remain in school. We are given an eroded work ethic, lack of educational aspiration, an inability and unwillingness to control ones children, increased single parenthood, promiscuity, criminal activity and physical violence.

Which is why there is something particularly offensive about the speed and ease into which *Fish Tank* takes us. Instead of probing beneath the surface for the underlying causes of the pathologies of poverty, its moves instead to inadvertently demonise the poor, which contributes to the right in blaming them for making bad choices, as though good ones were plentiful and immediately at hand. Through this, if we do not demonstrate the positions that create poverty, and focus instead only on the individuals currently occupying them, all that can happen, as in *Fish Tank*, is that the individual will escape, but the position of the poor will still be there, to be occupied by the next generation of the underclass. People will rotate in and out of poverty, but the poverty will remain intact.

Further, and related to this point, Arnold deprives her working class community of agency. They are victims of a system, with little or no control of their own lives. This approach is suitable when they are presented as individuals in *relation* to institutional frameworks. However, this creates a particular problem when we encounter events where her characters *do* make choices, and in isolation from the institutions i.e. the assaulting of a girl in an early scene, the kidnapping and attempted drowning of a child in the third act (a scene which echoes of the 1993 James Bulger murder). As such, people who do choose to partake in such behavior are no victims of a defunct political system; they are solely responsible for their own behavior and social position. The audience is offered no scope for a greater understanding than that. Thus, it is difficult to subscribe to Arnold's assertion that the film alludes to class reality.

Thirdly, the whole narrative is held together by set pieces, anecdote and rumor, with no real solid evidence of working class behavior. As such, the filmic result is over-simplifications and stereotypes cherry picked to support a not very strong conclusion. The engines of institutional oppression are conspicuously absent in *Fish Tank*. Leaving so much off screen, the film avoids an analysis of the situation from inside the experience of the characters, defining them externally. In this sense, she has denied the audience the connection between the socio-political realities of this existence and the images on the screen. In response to the accusations levelled at *Fish Tank* in a letter to *Sight & Sound*, stating that the film "offers little insight into social relations, precisely because it isn't grounded in reality," and accusing the film of "self-satisfied issue-skirting", Arnold stated;

I write what I know about, what I understand. Usually when I start writing, I don't have an intellectual idea about it, I just write about the characters as truthfully as I can, using my imagination. I always think from the image or from the character outwards. And usually the image has got a character that I can then go and explore  
(James, 2009:45)

Nick James, Editor of *Sight and Sound* defended the film by stating;

Without a doubt both *Red Road* and *Fish Tank* come from the British social realist tradition. But it's a more semi-poetic strain arguably than that

explored by Loach, who is nonetheless the godfather of Arnold's generation of British filmmakers (James, 2010: 2).

However, it is impossible to subscribe to either statement as all the difficulties that disconnect the protagonist and her family from society are absent. In this sense, she denied the audience the connection between the socio-political realities of this existence and the images on the screen. The film is work of an almost social scientist nature, an anthropological expeditionist who describes and analyses the cultural values and supposed psychological characteristics of working class Britain with no dissection of the contemporary problems of Britain's working class in relation to society, policy and economics.

As in all contemporary social realism, the landscape of *Fish Tank* is an abandoned inner city area, a satellite housing estate built to rehouse those displaced by earlier urban regeneration schemes, projects built to house migrant labour industrial towns where the industries that once provided jobs and relative affluence have moved to new locations. Social housing is no longer a normal entitlement for people who cannot afford to buy. It is a last gasp resource for the very low income and benefit receiving section of the working class. The average income of owner occupied households is 2.8 times that of social housing households. More than three fifths (63%) of social housing renters are economically inactive. Therefore, such excluded environments are the most visible and evident forms of exclusion (Runnymede 2009:46). However in *Fish Tank*, these elements, conceived to produce a realist aesthetic, fail to affect the negative vision of council estates and residents that inhabit them; the council estate fits nicely into a political agenda that already treats the environment as a natural habitat for theft, benefit fraud, delinquency and improvidence.

A whole new version of working class behaviour in Britain, one that has little relationship with political, social and economic status emerges in *Fish Tank* and Arnold misleadingly conflates the idea of the working class with the 'underclass'. Contemporary accounts of the white working class in British film narrow their focus to look at the very disadvantaged sections of the category, the lowest educated and those living in areas of the highest unemployment. While she has attempted to depict part of the British community on the periphery, in the manner that she has presented her characters as members of the underclass, as group however defined, they are in fact not synonymous with the working classes. Indeed, it is rather synonymous with the non-

working class. Marx obviously would recognise this group as the lumpenproletariat, while in English history we would recognise the distinction between the respectable and non-respectable branches of the working class, or deserving and undeserving poor in Conservative discourse. The problem for Arnolds's depiction is that she has done nothing to present the causes of this distinction.

### Class Representations within British Politics and the Film Industry

The broader issue is this shift in emphasis between the idea of structure (i.e. institutions, socio-economic arrangements) and agency (i.e. individual's moral failings/decisions) in British socio-political filmmaking, a shift that has reduced reality to a conflict between working class characters and their behavioural decisions. Working class existence emerges in popular consciousness not with any particular accuracy or specificity of detail or political alignment but through the conceptualisation of a particular strand of behaviour. The protagonist's immoral acts are more clearly defined in these films than the actual politics of the society, absolving the audience of any genuine socio-political enquiry that disregards cause and effects.

Much of the contemporary interest in social realism is in the behavioural characteristics of a category of person (the working class), which is still an unknown quantity, and the subject of fascination to the majority of middle class people who dominate our cultural (film) institutions, both in the positions of commissioning and filmmaking. As we have read in this chapter, at times social realism has hinted at a comprehensive ideology, but for most of the part it shies away from anything resembling a specific political statement, in keeping with its all inclusive aspirations. As a result however, social realism tends to be piecemeal. It facilitates discrete social issues without an account of the worldview underlying political, economic and institutional conditions responsible for bringing the issues about. The assertion of social inequality and political irresponsibility takes place in isolation from the political ideology, political institutions, and social relationships with them that could make any statement meaningful.



We must again consider the political shift of the Labour Party. In all instances but in particular in 1997, the Labour Party, while approaching the election that year presented itself as more modern and progressive than its Conservative opponents and convinced itself that it was following its own pre-election thinking when in office. The very retreat from the class rhetoric of Labour reformism, and the abandonment of the central policy planks of the Foot/Benn leadership during the years of opposition opened the way to the untrammelled absorbing of the Labour Party into the control structures of British capitalism. The result, as seen in 1997, was that where one could not distinguish a Labour MP from that of a Conservative even by their views, policies and rhetoric. In such a situation, it is no accident that the class content of the Labour leadership aspirations should drain over time, not at least because of its manifestations of working class aspirations, which create problems for them in their dealings with the City and with organised business. As politicians in power they depend for their success on the ability to find the common ground between opposing class forces. Failing that, they ally with the financially stronger class (Coates, 1975: 173).

Out of the logic of their own politics Labour leaders are drawn away from their class perspectives and their class roots and emerged highly sensitive to the requirements of the capitalist structure that they face, “increasingly socialised in the norms of parliamentary gradualism, increasingly prone to define reality from a managerial standpoint, increasingly reluctant to mobilise or radicalise their own working class electoral base and increasingly willing to use state power at times of state crisis directly against the material interests of the working class they claim to represent” (Coates, 1975: 174). Yet it is no accident that the Labour left has not created such mass support for itself. For the only way in which that mass support could have been created would have been if the Labour left had been prepared to take up unambiguously hostile positions against its own party leadership by mobilising the industrial power of the working class for political ends. Yes, there were reforms in the provision of welfare services and the maintenance of higher living standards and education. But even these piecemeal reforms did not seriously diminish the pattern of inequality in British society (Rawnsley, 2010: 776).

During the New Labour administration, it was deemed more appropriate to consider inequality as occurring between individuals rather than along dimensions other than class, and maximised the term ‘social mobility’. Social mobility refers to the movement up and down a system of

hierarchically ordered economic and social positions, a term employed by New Labour to avoid engaging in direct class language. Social mobility bears upon another central social process – that of class formation and class solidarity. This was expedient to New Labour as their central belief was that high degrees of social mobility would reduce class conflict; solidarity and common identity would be difficult to sustain if there is significant movement between classes (Brison, 2011: 131). However, British studies have always defined this hierarchy as a system of classes.

Part of the problem is the contemporary British definition of working and middle class. We do find definitional differences with academics from across socio - political and socio-cultural traditions. As such, our conception of class here tends to be grounded more in the Marxist understandings of class structures. There are of course many other definitions and understandings of class built around differing economic, cultural and social conceptions. In the US, the term middle class covers anyone who is economically self-sufficient (in other words, what we in Britain would regard as the skilled and semi-skilled working class). In the UK, because we have traditionally seen the middle class as the antithesis of the aristocracy (i.e. they could very rich, but they remained middle class because they didn't have a specific lineage or pedigree), we possess an image of the middle class as being very wealthy. In the context of a contemporary analysis of social positioning, it is dangerous to set-up a simple dichotomy of middle and working class lifestyle and frame an argument around them, since contemporary class identity is very fluid and complex (Anstead, N:2012) But does this mean to say that under these complex circumstances filmmakers can have nothing clear to say about the class relations in contemporary British society? Of course not. But it does suggest that what we have to say may not be correlated to the genuine language of class and race politics. It requires a rethinking of narrative methods that privilege style and surface realism over concrete social engagement.

The problem also lies with the contemporary understanding of class as a concept within British cinema. As stated, there are several major theoretical and political trajectories to the understanding of class as a concept in the UK, and in the context of this thesis, we approach this conceptualisation through Marxism, which prioritises the role of exploitation and struggle in the making of classes and hence social relations. Class is about relative inequality, and is an “inherently comparative concept” (Miliband, 1972: 44). It is not just about what one group has,

or where it stands in society, but about what it has in relation to another social group. Therefore, class is an antagonistic relationship. Firstly, because of the relationship between those at the bottom of the social ladder and not just the classes above, and the systemic constructs that prevent those on the periphery from reducing the economic distance between those social groups, manifested in the government institutions that implement reductive public policies. Secondly, the relationship is antagonistic because it is always based on a concerted system of exploitation and control (Runnymede, 2008: 36).

We can analyse the shifts that have taken place amongst the 'left' in British society, specifically in relation to political criticism. Historically, the left has been particularly adept at accusations of betrayal aimed at the Labour Party; in other words, producing governments that do not live up to commitments made whilst in opposition and failing to meet expectations of their supporters. Broadly, these disaffected supporters have taken two forms; the middle class intelligentsia and traditional supporters (working class). What is significant is the political centrality of Labour's intellectual opponents in constructing the critique, as opposed to working class opponents (Anstead, N: 2013). This is also reflected in a tendency of non-working class directors shaping narratives focusing on this very demographic. The working classes continue to have access to relatively low levels of the kind of material, cultural and psychological resources that aid successful entry and establishment within the film industry.

At this point, it is conducive to also consider the class positions of the key stakeholders in the British film industry. The influence of middle class ideology with specific regards to arts and culture also reached into the increasingly middle class-dominated film industry in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was in the public and independent schools that the middle-class culture code came to predominate and this was followed by a shift towards middle-class dominance in the film industry. Recruitment, career consolidation and pathways to promotion continue to be disproportionately the preserve of those from elite and established backgrounds – private and independent schools and Oxbridge. The educated ethos excludes those of lower or no formal education (or lineage) from occupying key decision-making roles within the film industry.

Good contacts remain the dominant method of securing employment in the British film industry. Many people take on internships or unpaid work to develop their contacts and secure work. In the 1980s, only 5% of the total British film industry workforce had completed unpaid work in the industry, compared to nearly 50% by 2000 (Bhavnani, 2007: 61). Clearly people from lower income backgrounds are disadvantaged as a result of this practice. During qualification courses, over half of white students had work experience in the sector, compared to 28% of minority ethnic students. In research into minority ethnic groups' independent production companies, one third of the organisations had used unpaid workers, this being more common among minority ethnic employees (Bhavnani, 2007: 61). For example, preventing interns in the film industry from being paid meant only those that could afford to live without an income (the middle and upper class) gained invaluable internships within the film industry. This, of course, gave this demographic the opportunity to establish superiority and dominance both in front and behind the camera. In this way, the upper and middle classes have been able to dominate both the strategic thinking and the creative output for decades in a British film industry that remains inherently elitist at best and discriminatory at worst.

## Summary

The middle class, of all political positions, retain an uncomfortable fear, "bordered on eugenics", of the uneducated working class. This produces an "authoritarian social structure" that is reproduced in our institutions (Cruddas, J: 2011). Specifically, The BBC's employment culture is weighed down by its history of social biases, and its inherent inability to respond to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century reality of Britain's multi-ethnic and minority populations (Born: 2005:197). As in the previous decade, where criticisms of class and regional bias were to the fore, there remain sections of the public systemically alienated from the BBC. Thus, script editors, screenwriters, directors and producers come from a too narrow and nepotistic circle, shaping the creative output in terms of subject matter and the representation of issues and minorities. They should they be recruited from other areas of life, to feed new experiences into the editorial process (Born, 2005: 332). This lack of working class representation has meant that this group has not been allowed to fully participate in politics of British film, nor to organise themselves in where they could voice

their concerns nor publicise their views visually through a middle class dominated film industry. It is precisely because the BBC claims universality that it needs urgently to address these issues.

Since 1982, Channel 4 has invested over £350 million in British film (Brown, 2007: 232). However, the collapse of the first incarnation of FilmFour was the result of the pursuit of an Americanised, studio system British cinema at the expense of its original film remit. Paul Webster's objective was not to supply the needs of the channel but to compete in the broader movie market and to create a business. As FilmFour was a limited company and separate from the main channel, it did not fall under Channel 4's original remit. Further, once it did fall under direct control from the channel when relaunched as Film Four Productions in 2006, Channel 4's license to broadcast included a programme policy statement that demanded a *minimum* number of broadcasting hours are dedicated to serving those on the periphery of British Society, and in only a few certain areas, such as education, news and current affairs. The Channel 4 remit did not specify every area of its programming to appeal to minority audiences, only a suitable proportion (Brown, 2006:198).

Webster claims that FilmFour was not a failure financially; he blamed the "overall situation" - by which he means a failure of the parent company to understand film financing, coupled with the advertising downturn. The business reopened in 2006 with Tessa Ross, formerly Head of Drama for the BBC Independent Commissioning Group, at the helm three months later, working with smaller budgets and a change of commissioning strategy. What Paul Webster originally attempted at FilmFour was to turn it into a standalone business that was not subsidised in effect by the television channel. It proved too arduous, not least because the relationship between a broadcaster and a film company will always prove complex as the broadcaster will always want the filmic product programming immediately for terrestrial release. Webster stated that:

It's important to make films that travel. You can't make films that just appeal to the UK market, because you're forced into making films of such a small budget that the demands are too rigorous of an audience - and then you're driven into an art-house ghetto. There are, of course, exceptions like Mike Leigh but I think there's a greater consciousness of making a film connect to an audience (Allison, 2008).

However, in trying to compete with Hollywood, Webster showed a catastrophic ignorance of the history of the British film industry, which is littered with the corpses of film companies that tried to break into the American market (Wayne N: 2012).

BBC Films, set up during the Producers Choice era to maximise profitability in the international market, has not produced a body of films that can really be understood as representing the broad views and positions occupied in contemporary British society. Whilst they have had some success in bringing alternative voices and stories to the British public in independent and big budgeted films like *Bullet Boy* (Saul Dibb, 2004), *Billy Elliot*, *Fish Tank*, *Made In Dagenham* and the continued support of Ken Loach's work, for all that has been argued in this chapter of the trends that took place at Channel 4, the BBC Films productions remain significantly distinct from Film4 produced films in terms of the representation and treatment of both working class characters and the subsequent issues that should arise from these narratives. The dominant trend is for a British heritage style of film culture with American co-production (with varying approaches) depicting middle class characters and concerns in films such as *An Education*, (Lone Scherfig, 2009) *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (Lynn Ramsay, 2011) *The Mother* (Roger Mitchell, 2006) *Notes on a Scandal* (Richard Eyre 2006) *The Duchess* (Saul Dibb, 2008) and *Revolutionary Road* (Sam Mendes, 2008). This is reflective of both the narrow pool of talent that the BBC draws its screenwriters, producers and directors from and an inability to bring to the public a wide range of films that speak to all members of society. The few films that attempt to allude to some sort of social reality (*Fish Tank*, *Bullet Boy*) are depoliticised lest they bring the nation into disrepute.

The pursuit of commercialism and transatlantic success has rendered socially conscious programming that featured heavily on the BBC in the form of *The Wednesday Plays*, *Play for Today*, and television series like *Boys from the Blackstuff* (Alan Bleasdale, 1982) relics from a distant past. The BBC Charter can be interpreted by many as a commitment to impartiality in terms of the need to represent certain aspects of the broad British life. However, in no meaningful sense does the BBC demonstrates its impartiality about class or political perspectives - it has a most definite perspective on this (Abercrombe, 2000: 379). It is precisely because the

BBC is publicly owned and paid for by the TV License that there is a demand for a wider representation of characters, classes and themes in their production.

The UKFC was established with a limited, subjective range of interests, and the incompatibility of trade interests and public interests were either unconsidered or disregarded. It is argued here that the New Labour government, manifest in the UKFC placed too much a reliance on trade interests and the American film industry. The very process of devising and establishing the UKFC was conducted without any detailed parliamentary or civil service scrutiny, as no bill was presented to parliament regarding the creation of the new film body. Further, the review body that informed New Labour's film policy was composed of film industry company executives, and it was as a direct result of this body's recommendations that the DCMS created the UKFC, and delegated it all responsibilities for film (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 425).

The UKFC's board members were appointed by the government, with it being given the status of a non-departmental public body funded by the DCMS. From its formation, it was drawn up almost entirely from a very small network of film and television industry senior executives, with thirteen of the fifteen members drawn from the upper echons of the film industry with one seat occupied by the BFI chairperson and one to an educationalist. Crucially, none had any expertise in non-mainstream cinema and two were members of the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPA). These appointment decisions seemed to prioritise trade interests over public interests, further distancing themselves away from notions of a British Independent film culture that could provide the space for socio-political filmmaking (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 426). The appointment of the film director Alan Parker as the UKFC board's First Chair reinforces this argument as Parker was an outspoken advocate of big budgeted transatlantic productions and financial partnerships. Further, he was critical of both British independent cinema and the functions the BFI. Therefore, both in its formation and its key personnel and objectives, the UKFC represented the interest of mainstream, American orientated directors, producers and distributors. The controversial nature of the funding decisions, which were operated not by a cultural framework but by executive committee (effectively civil servants mirroring an American studio system, the index of this was that the board members were now commanding studio executive salaries) led to the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT) demanding

that each fund manager involved in the decision making process should be given a limited tenure in their roles (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 427).

The cost of the UKFC to the public, revealed by Gordon Brown in 2004 when the information was drawn via parliamentary interrogation, showed that support to the film industry since 1997 was £2 billion. As well as via direct funding, this figure was also achieved through the tax concessions made available to filmmakers funded through UKFC. These were provided under section 42 of the Finance Act of 1992, and until 2004, under Section 48 of the Finance Act of 1997, to support productions under £15 million budget. In 2004, the budget was raised from £15 to £20 million (Dickenson and Harvey, 2005: 425). These tax allowances were put in place in a concerted effort to ensure the British film industry imitate the Hollywood studio system of production. However, it is argued here that the objective was to compete, not against Hollywood, but *against* potential European and global rivals for Hollywood co-production investment.

In 2010 UK General Elections, none of the parties achieved the 326 seats required for an overall majority. This resulted in a hung Parliament as no party was able to command a majority in the House of Commons. While a coalition government was established between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats as a result the Tories, led by David Cameron, won the largest number of votes and seats and was thus invited by the Queen to form a government. One of the first acts of this coalition was to abolish the UKFC as part of a wider cost-cutting drive by the DCMS. In response to this announcement the UKFC Chair, Tim Bevan, one of the UK's most commercially successful film producers stated:

Abolishing the most successful film support organisation the UK has ever had is a bad decision, imposed without any consultation or evaluation. People will rightly look back on today's announcement and say it was a big mistake, driven by short-term thinking and political expediency. British film, which is one of the UK's more successful growth industries, deserves better (UK Film Council, 2010:1).

The abolition of the UKFC drew further criticism from representatives of the UK film industry and from abroad, with director and producer Mike Leigh paralleling the decision to "abolishing the NHS". The DCMS announcement abolishing the UKFC also stated a desire to create a "less



bureaucratic relationship" between the Government and the BFI (UK Parliament, 2010). This suggested that the BFI could be involved in administering the objectives undertaken by the UKFC.

The UKFC Annual Report published in March 2010 declared that the UKFC spent £8.3 million of its grant-in-aid funding of £37 million on its operational costs (UK Film Council, 2010:11). Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport defended his decision to abolish the UKFC by declaring that "stopping money being spent on a film quango is not the same as stopping money being spent on film" (Thorpe, 2010:1). Further, he implied that the UKFC was guilty of maladministration with public money, stating that "the Film Council spent 24% of the grant that it received on its own admin and we asked ourselves if there was a better way to support the UK film industry than having a large number of executives paid more than £100,000 and an office in LA" (Thorpe, 2010:1).

UKFC distributed more than £160 million of National lottery money to over 900 films (Vir, 2012). However, the UKFC's vision of talent development during this time was very much crouched in the short term and lacked foresight. It is suggested here that the films funded by the UKFC were produced with little understanding or consideration of the broad British public. Despite the UKFC growing in economic power during its lifespan (the UKFC itself received grant-in-aid from the Government, which in 2009/10 amounted to £37 million, a £7 million increase from its 2008/09 grant. The total Lottery income for 2009/10 received by the UKFC was £34.2 million) (UK Film Council, 2010:11) providing institutions and filmmakers with enhanced opportunities to bring to fruition their development plans, they became more answerable and accountable to the New Labour government that invested in them. While commercially a triumph, the constraints of working within the competitive film industry perhaps prevented the UKFC from adopting a suitable and complete historical and developmental approach in regard to the kind of films they financed. Instead of looking to the past in order to help explain the present and to predict the future, they came to look at the present and towards the future. From this perspective, however, their attempt at representing, and extending the accessibility of film to all parts of society were understandably flawed, and this will continue to undermine the British film industry's attempts for future planning so long as they ignore the class aspects in British film.

Thus, a more complete analysis of British film was undoubtedly required, as part of a concerted programme to expand representation and implement change in the future.

Despite the RSAs, the concentration of the UKFC within the South East has also created a regional bias that has influenced the number of films produced that represent a politicised working class. If we consider the great working class intellectuals and arts projects (to name an obvious example, the Everyman Theatre, the British New Wave writers) they came from regional industrial cities. There remains the idea of the working class intellectual in these areas, but this is not the case in London. This can be attributed to the concentration of capital to the City of London in the last 30 years. So we are seeing a geographical shift in British film culture as well – namely, as London has come to be more culturally and financially dominant (and other cities have declined), a very London-centric view of class and identity has stymied the success of other film projects, which might have had a stronger class identity (Anstead, N:2012)

During the UKFC tenure the film industry lacked the shared quest to explore our nation's complexities. The industry also displayed an in-built distrust of the filmic auteur - depriving us of a European-style stream of autonomous writer-directors who both entertain and critically reflect on their society. So there was nothing left but to maximise on the common language the British film industry was developing with Hollywood. American production in the UK did provide employment for British film industry workers, and in return the American studios were given a 20% tax credit by the British government. However, the worldwide profits do not get taxed in the UK, as they were financed by American corporations. Further, UKFC subsidised the American film industry by paying for digital projectors in over 200 British cinemas. As independent British films aspiring for theatrical release in reasonably sized theatres required 35mil celluloid prints, this appeared to be a demonstration of the UKFC's commitment to the exhibition of low budget feature films, as digital projection was much more economically viable for independent filmmakers, producers and distributors. However, the majority of the projector servers were installed in the cinemas' main, 500-1000 seater theatres, where highly commercial American films such as *Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster, 2008) and *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) were screened, as opposed to the smaller theatres. This rendered this practice as unsuitable as it

benefitted only American studio productions and British independent films would not be able to fill these theatres, and as a result were deprived of a potential audience.

Criticism can also be leveled at the UKFC's Prints and Advertising Fund, created to provide money for extra prints of non-mainstream and commercially focused British film. However, £175,000 of UK public money was given to mainstream US distribution companies like the Weinstein Company, a subsidiary of Universal, for their British release of *Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden* (Morgan Spurlock, 2008). Fox US were also given £154,000 for the UK release of the Rolling Stones documentary *Shine a Light* (Martin Scorsese, 2009).

UKFC statistics, published on 20 January 2011, stated that British films made over £1 billion at the box office in 2010, up 2% from 2009. Investment in new UK film production reached £1.5 billion across 119 films in 2010, a new record for the British film industry. Further, some of the most original and challenging films of the past decade were funded by the UKFC: *Better Things*, *Bright Star*, *The Constant Gardener*, *Gosford Park*, *Red Road*, *Another Year*, and *The King's Speech*. The UKFC's Microwave fund, administered through Film London, allowed British independent filmmakers working on a less-commercial terrain to receive mainstream development, funding and distribution for their films. But it would be questionable to look upon the UKFC as committed promoters of independent British cinema when so many of the projects they funded or co-funded were failures, both commercially and critically. *Grown Your Own* (Richard Laxton, 2007), *Sex Lives of the Potato Men* (Andy Humphries 2004), *Mrs Ratcliffe's Revolution* (Bille Eltringham, 2007), *Inside I'm Dancing* (Damien O'Donnell 2004), *Anita & Me* (Metin Hüseyin, 2002), *Three & Out* (Jonathan Gershfield, 2008), *Straightheads* (Dan Reed, 2007), *Long Time Dead* (Marcus Adams, 2002), *Donkey Punch* (Oliver Blackburn, 2008), *Franklyn* (Gerald McMorrow, 2007) and *The Cottage* (Paul Andrew Williams, 2008) are all British films (all comedies and horror films) that received UKFC funding yet performed disastrously at the box office as a result of bad decision making in regard to their commissioning, development and distribution. This created a much more conservative approach to funding independent British film as budgets have become smaller and much more focused on potential commercial hits. Further, hundreds of other projects the UKFC funded didn't make it past the development stage. Even the Microwave scheme, which challenged producers to make a feature for £75,000 suggests

that British independent cinema became a mere footnote in the wider UKFC narrative of transatlantic commercialism. In his 2010 film *UK Film Council: Out to Lunch?* filmmaker/producer Chris Atkins suggested that the UKFC disregarded British independent film projects as they would not generate direct profit.

If the UKFC invested in a hit film, they as a business would recoup the money back. But their investment in new British cinema did not increase with this surplus value, with the money going back into the UKFC coffers. This practice is why they backed commercially promising films (Chris Atkins, 2010).

Thus, success was measured only in terms of inward investment and recoument. In his statement on 26 July 2010 Jeremy Hunt said that:

Abolishing the UK Film Council and establishing a direct and less bureaucratic relationship with the British Film Institute would support front-line services while ensuring greater value for money. Government and Lottery support for film will continue"  
(UK Parliament:2010).

On 29 November 2010, Conservative minister for culture Ed Vaizey confirmed that the BFI will become the "flagship body for film policy in the UK"; and the BFI would be selected as the distributor of film Lottery money via secondary legislation. He also announced that lottery funding for UK film will increase from £27 million to more than £40 million by 2014. In response, Amanda Nevill, Director of the BFI said the organisation would need to "change quite fundamentally from the board down to bring in new people and new skills into the additional organisation to do that" (UK Parliament:2010).

The weakness here is that the British film industry, despite years of public funding and government tax breaks is still not self sufficient, and will continue to have a reliance on public money for its survival. This means that there will always be a socio-cultural demand on any structural framework that the film institutions implement. However, the economic considerations

on what is essentially an *industry* will continue to be privileged and with that in mind, its no surprise that cultural worth will suffer. Prioritising the cultural value of film, as with British social realism, would require a radical change in ideology. The BFI are now in a position to deliver a broad and varied film culture and the objective of sustaining a British film industry, providing that culture, and not commercial viability, is its principle goal, as the economically dominant American cinema model, pursued by the UKFC, proved unable to reflect the varied complexities of a multicultural, class driven Britain.

The effects of the organisational, economic, social and political changes in both British society and the film industry have corroded a socio-political film culture. We need concrete investigations of substandard housing, class discrimination, and police harassment and abuse motivated by racial animus, the visual exposing of the antagonistic relationship between the lower and upper class who, as well as using their privilege to access to state resources, reinforce vertical relations and discourage horizontality. The language of social realism doesn't capture these distinctive injustices. Instead, that language emphasizes some of the ills working class people face and ignore more other, more lasting harms. In fact, describing the plights of the working class in terms of behaviour, consistent with the liberal, left of centre mandate may even contribute to liberal patronage and ventriloquism. Films such as *Fish Tank* are bound to be popular amongst a left leaning audience, however this can be attributed to the fact that the film does not allude to real class antagonisms, pitting capitalists and the rich on one side of the social divide against the working class on the other. For the liberal middle class, there is no stimulus for investigating the ambiguities of their own privileged position.

However, shifting from current trends to holistic political attack may be an improvement in term of substance, but can be regressive in terms of a cinematic experience for an audience. The extension of contemporary social realism into new territory requires writers and directors to change not only their defining concerns and issues but also the narrative choices they make. The need to entertain is as paramount to the craft of filmmaking as is to inform an audience, and what needs to be created is a body of films that present social concerns within a plausible and dramatic narrative that will draw in and hold an audiences attention throughout the film.

Further, in the current conjuncture in which neoliberalism has become hegemonic, with New Labour accepting uncritically the tenets of capitalism and the Coalition government extending it, commercial success will rarely be achieved by filmmakers wishing to allude to political reality rather than popularism. Again, the aspect of social criticism in Loach's films needs to be taken into consideration. However, this has been made possible by Loach's long standing relationship with both the BBC and Film Four, and his 'heritage' status within the industry that permits Sixteen Films to be indifferent to the box office.

British cinema in the Labour years seemed to evade the big questions in British society. The euphoria and feel good factor was everywhere in films like the *Full Monty* which more or less told the working class that you should be joyful despite unemployment. This should have been anathema to filmmakers of the left (Murphy, 2010: 223). This national cinema needed at the false optimism of the times. This appealed to a new audience, no longer motivated by utopian, left wing imperatives but consumed by a need for political correctness born out of expediency in a post- Macphersonist social climate.

When political issues are presented as if they were choices of morality, the balancing of political decisions that are central to social realism becomes lost in uncertainty and, more crucially, misrepresentation. There have been genuine attempts at representing the working class in recent films such as *Tyrannosaur* (Paddy Constantine, 2011) and *Ill Manors* (Ben Drew, 2012). But these approaches still use the rhetoric of class behaviour, increasingly shifting focus from systemic obstacles to individual irresponsibility with one's life. This distorts the public policy decisions that shape these behavioural choices, permitting a narrow analysis to displace wider political concerns.

To genuinely make sense of the problems of the working class, we need to understand how social change and long-term shifts in economic structure have affected class inequalities more generally. This requires films that give a clear perspective on political issues, communicated through the actions of the protagonist. To re-attain this communication, all the frameworks of escapist, voyeuristic social realism must be replaced by a cinematic form that attempts to tell the truth and such for a language capable of sending a social message to the spectator. It must be a summons for action that not only expresses society, but also actively participates in it. Public

policy criticism is not just the domain of oppositional parties and newspapers. Film can be more than just a visual experience; it can be a sight of a realistic portrayal of society, it affects political imagination, shaping, and to some extent extending the kind of social change that can be achieved. This is why we find comprehensive, detailed, filmic political engagement compelling. We need to look to the details of political institutions, and public policy. Sometimes film can play an important role in influencing these political discussions, but effectiveness is usually a matter of effective representation. Of course, the real discussions must take place in Parliament. In one sense, film is a tool for making people take note. British cinema requires a continuous body of films that explore the experience of the working class, of how their social exclusion affects them and how they deal with a sense of powerlessness and lack of self-esteem. The protagonist is not only the narrative centrepiece, but announces the film's political views via the character's actions in reaction to state institutions.

The failure to understand the different ways of conceptualising class inequality and behaviour has produced an inconsistent genre, without narrative attention to the political discourses that frame them. If we are to challenge the perception of working class in contemporary British cinema, then filmmakers must operate at different narrative levels, a *New Social Realism*, bringing their concerns visually in the classrooms, the institutions, as well as the wider socio-economic context. This calls for a politicized filmic practice that extends beyond the surface, aesthetics and the clichéd behavioural set pieces of the working class protagonist that seeks to interrogate wider patterns of inequality.

The Conservatives and New Labour have long identified the importance of how issues are framed and presented, and so must the filmic practitioner. Someone on welfare can be described as the casualty or the agent of his or her own poverty. Which of these two notions that prevail in the film essentially ushers the political responses and the level and shape of social consciousness. If the welfare dependents are victims of systemic inequality, then government intervention and rethinking is required. The implications on government policy need to be expressed clearly in the cinematic storytelling, as does the tangible evidence justifying the specific social issue. If they are victims, it must be filmically demonstrated, as does the victimiser. For this filmic demonstration to be effective, there can be no leaps in the narrative that carries the viewer from the issue to the outcome, with no treatment of one issue in isolation to the systemic structures

that cultivate it. What we are experiencing is the culturalisation of what are primarily political conflicts, providing voyeuristic material to an educated liberal middle class audience. Social realism is afflicted with the weakness of socio-political thinking, and must change in order to respect valid political concerns.

If there is any place where political irresponsibility should be exposed filmically it is here, in Coalition Britain; the limits on living standards for the bottom of society, the recapitalising of the banks and the increasing of income taxing as a result while offering tax cuts to the wealthy and deregulation to the private sector, the dismantling of the university sector which places an impossible price on education for all but the upper middle class – isn't it against precisely these sorts of systemic structures that the traditions of filmic political engagement, laid down by Grierson, Richardson, Anderson, Reize and Ken Loach, should inspire a New Social Realism?



## Chapter Two: Not in the Frame: The Emergence of Black British Political Filmmaking and its Broken Relationship with Social Realism.

This chapter sets out to examine the ways in which 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration in the post-Second World War period and subsequent race struggles influenced the burgeoning socio-political character of ethnic minority filmmaking in Britain. An examination is conducted of the ways in which black filmmaking was characterised by its politicized account of British life and how post-Macpherson multiculturalism via a New Labour discourse helped depoliticize this film content. This chapter seeks to examine these and related developments up until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Post War Immigration into the United Kingdom

Several plausible reasons can be proposed to explain the contemporary depoliticization of black British filmmaking, and the inability of the British film industry to create a lasting black British film culture, one with a fidelity to the realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain; a lack of sufficient funding, an absence of historical knowledge and racial awareness, the by-products of state multiculturalism, and the persistence of unequal access for certain sections of British society.

The gradual demise of the British Empire and the economic effects of World War Two coincided with the first major influx of immigrants from the Caribbean, Indian and later, African subcontinent. During the war, the British government had accumulated huge debts, particularly to America. In addition, the destruction caused by bombings created an urgent need for new housing. As a result, the British government actively encouraged mass immigration from the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth to fill shortages in the labour market. The 1948 British Nationality Act provided British citizenship to all people of the Commonwealth countries, including full rights of entry and residency in the UK (Craig 2008:17).

The *Empire Windrush* arrived at Tilbury on 22 June 1948, carrying 493 passengers from Jamaica, these passengers being the first large group of West Indian immigrants to the UK after the Second World War. While the largest proportion of this African-Caribbean immigration (and ones to follow) in the UK were of Jamaican origin, other nations such as Trinidad and Tobago,

Saint Kitts and Nevis, Barbados Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia and Dominica settled in London. (Fryer 2003:22). Although Afro-Caribbeans were invited into Britain via immigration campaigns created by successive British governments, the new arrivals were to endure prejudice, discrimination and extreme racism from white Britain. This experience was to signify Afro-Caribbeans' antagonistic relations with the wider British Society. As a result, while there was work available in post-war Britain in industries such as British Rail, London Transport and the National Health Service, early immigrants found private employment and housing denied to them on the basis of ethnicity. Trade unions, seeing immigrants as a threat to their own employment security, would refuse Afro-Caribbean workers help and counsel and pubs, clubs, and churches would bar black people from entering. As housing was in short supply following the wartime bombing, this led to some of the initial conflicts with the already - present white community. This continued into the 1950s, and riots erupted in other cities including Birmingham and Nottingham (Fryer 2003:23). In 1958, under the influence of the racism and intolerance incited by explicitly anti-immigration movements including Oswald Mosley's Union Movement and the White Defence League, violent attacks in the West London area of Notting Hill by white 'Teddy Boy' youths led Afro-Caribbeans, in an act of solidarity, to the creation of the annual Notting Hill Carnival. This change in the ethnic composition and the conflicts it generated in Britain became the catalyst for the socio-political implications that were to follow in British cinema.

### The Beginning of Race Representation in British Cinema

Small shifts began to appear in relation to black cinematic representation. Three films, produced during this period, investigated the issue of race in Britain. The cultural impact of these films cannot be assessed without taking into account the form in which they were presented. Racial issues were invariably contained within a filmic formula, which became identified as the 'social problem' genre, using the conventions of the thriller and the police procedural. While this narrative approach ensured that the issue of race was accepted by the audience, the potential cultural impact was not so much to create an understanding of immigrant communities' cultures and practices as to dramatise the white population's intrinsic fear of the other, married with a

subtle plea for tolerance. Thus, unsurprisingly, none of the films of this period – *Pool of London* (Basil Dearden, 1951) *Sapphire* (Basil Dearden, 1959), and *Flame in the Streets* (Roy Barker, 1961) specifically interrogated the socio-racial hierarchies in place in 1950s Britain. *Pool of London* became one of the earliest films in British cinema to bring to the screen the issue of prevailing racial intolerance and prejudice. Johnny, a black merchant seaman, becomes involved in an interracial relationship against the backdrop of docklands criminality. As stated, while this was the first instance of interracial relationship in British film, race featured as an issue, as opposed to the *theme* in the context of an otherwise non-racial narrative. Bodily contact between the lovers is kept at a minimum and anything further would have been seen as breaking social taboos. It was not until the race riots in Notting Hill in 1958 that issues concerning race relations became core themes in black British filmmaking.

*Flame in the Streets* is distinctive in terms of the early films presenting ethnic minority characters in the way it links the personal with the political in a singular narrative, interweaving both class and race. Made just two years after the Notting Hill Riots, the film is an unequivocal liberal filmic statement for racial tolerance. The core of the film revolves around Nell, whose morphing from a dedicated housewife to an overt racist is challenged by her daughter's relationship with a black teacher. Basil Dearden, the director, attempted to expose the passive racism of her husband Peter by paralleling the personal conflict between his wife and daughter with the professional conflict; as a trade union representative he succeeds in introducing his work colleagues to the idea that a black co-worker can occupy a management role despite the disquiet that his difference has generated from the white workers who see an integrated workforce as a threat to their own job security. Having succeeded in persuading his work colleagues to accept the advancement of ethnic minorities in the workforce, he struggles to display a benevolent attitude towards his daughter's relationship with a black man in the face of abhorrence from his wife. In marrying trade unionism with notions of equality that extend to ethnic minorities, the idea of a collectivized working class that, represented in the anti-racist character of Johnny, can transcend racial difference is given a filmic treatment for the first time in British Cinema.

These films came to prominence during the British New Wave period; however they have historically been detached from this movement, with the films of Anderson, Richardson and

Reisz deemed as more sophisticated, less homespun and of greater aesthetic quality. Films like *Sapphire, Victim* (Basil Dearden, 1961) and *A Place to Go* (Basil Dearden, 1963) preceded and paralleled the work of the 'angry young men', a synonym for the British New Wave films that had been adapted from plays written by young playwrights who shaped their narratives around working class characters. However, in clearly demonstrating the courage to deal with race, these films displayed greater bravery and fidelity to the realities of immigrant life and a political awareness than their supposedly more innovative, educated and talented colleagues (Kirk 2009:73).

*Sapphire* tells the story of a young pregnant student who has been the victim of a vicious murder, with her white boyfriend being the prime suspect. As the police investigation deepens, the police conclude that the murder was racially motivated, and it's only when the victim's brother comes into direct contact with the family of the accused that the pathological hatred that his sister holds for black people is exposed, and through her vitriolic tirade of racial abuse directed at him, the murderer is incriminated. Dearden manipulates the flow of tension within the narrative through fragmented revelations about the character throughout the story, leading up to the film's climax. Dearden takes a liberal position on racism through the pairing of two contrasting police officers, one a covert racist and the other displaying understanding and benevolence to London's ethnic minorities. The two characters strands of thought compete against each other and inform the narrative trajectory. Despite the liberal imperatives of the director, the film is not without subscription to the stereotypes and prejudices of the period. Civic racism goes unchallenged by the characters and in the use of the London jazz music scene, inhabited by blacks, as the source of criminal activity seems to pathologise the very themes that are being brought to screen. This was problematised by Nina Hibbin, writing in *the Daily Worker* (9 May 1959), who had expected a much more polemical confrontation with the racist hegemony of the period:

"You can't fight the colour bar merely by telling people it exists.  
You have to attack it, with passion and conviction. Commit  
yourself up to the hilt. Otherwise you're in danger of fanning the flames  
(Bourne, 2005:196).

Hibbin's comments describe the problem of merely displaying social, or in this context racial conflicts and prejudices without critically engaging with them. The result produced very little stimulus in raising levels of consciousness that could advance the director's argument into those areas where they may be socially effective. In the course of the British New Wave, these filmic investigations into the prevalent racial tensions are thin, and this reluctance of the British New Wave films to confront the existing racial conflict of the period is no more evident than in *Saturday Night Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960) where minority ethnic issues are invisible, despite these themes being a feature of the book (Bhavnani 2007: 131).

By 1961, over ten years after the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury and despite the British government undertaking systemic measures to greatly reduce immigration (until the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, all Commonwealth citizens could enter and stay in the United Kingdom without any restriction) approximately 172,000 people had immigrated from the West Indies, with a further 83,000 people from the Commonwealth settling in the UK between 1968 and 1975 (Fryer 2003:26). While the majority of blacks found residence in the run down inner cities of London, Birmingham and Manchester, significant communities also settled in other areas, such as Bradford, Nottingham, Coventry, Luton, Leicester, Bristol, Leeds, Huddersfield, Sheffield, Liverpool and Cardiff, in particular areas like Brixton, Harlesden, Tottenham, Dalston, Lewisham and Peckham in London, West Bowling and Heaton in Bradford, Chapeltown in Leeds, St Pauls in Bristol, Handsworth and Aston in Birmingham and Moss Side in Manchester (Fryer 2003:27). Asian immigration extended to the old mill industry towns of Salford, Burnley, Blackburn and Bolton, where the industry was in decline, jobs for new arrivals were scarce and social integration non-existent, creating a 'group density' effect, in which new arrivals grouped together in an act of solidarity and protection from the prejudice of the citizens of the host nation, who felt a sense of invasion. The Labour governments of 1964-1970 responded positively to these concerns, and in 1966 the then Home Secretary marked an official move towards multiculturalism, defining this not as a flattening process of assimilation, but of equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance (Thomas 2011: 58).

## Case Study: *Pressure*

By the early 1970's, television had become the dominant medium for representing British race relations, predominantly in the shape of sociological documentaries investigating the numerous aspects of apparent immigrant existence. However, as the commissioners, producers and practitioners involved in devising and making these programs were all white, these programmes tended to pathologise and particularize the ethnic minority experience, rather than providing insight, education and new perspectives on the subjects. Thus, it took over 20 years for the British film establishment to recognize the potential in ethnic minority filmmaking, when *Pressure* (Horace Ove, 1974) became the first film by a black director to be fully financed by the BFI (Mercer 1988:17). Arguably the most important filmmaker to lead the way in depicting black culture, Trinidadian born Ove's film tells the story of a black teenager Tony, torn between the Trinidadian roots of his immigrant family and his own British identity.

Tony, young, black and educated, struggles to assimilate into mainstream British society despite his credentials. His unemployment directs him to his brother's politicised approach to black identity, and while not holistically subscribing to this discourse, his marginalisation (in the shape of police brutality and estrangement from his white friends) exposes him to the reality of British life for young black men and his adherence to a more politicized solution. Cinematically, the devices employed by Ove derive heavily from the work of Ken Loach from the previous decade; the handheld camera provides instability to the frame that contributes to the sense of tension and urgency. More crucially, the use of natural vernacular specific to Afro-Caribbeans and the uninterrupted flow of the dialogue creates immediacy to the film that is closer to documentary film practices than a narrative account of racism. With themes similar to that of *Babylon* (Franco Rosso, 1980) *Pressure* draws on the controversial and oppressive 'suspicion' laws that allowed the Metropolitan Police to target and harass innocent young black males in urban areas of London, and brings to the screen the deeply embedded racism of much of the surrounding white community in London (Newland, 2010:85).

To understand the film's cultural impact, some contextual elements associated with its release must be taken into consideration. The film was produced outside the mainstream film industry – the funding given to Ove from the BFI was initially intended to finance a short film. At this

specific time, the BFI had no concentrated strategy for cinema and finances in place to ensure the cinematic release of feature-length films. Completed in the summer of 1975, the film did not receive theatrical release until January 1978. The delay was also attributed to the apprehension of the Metropolitan Police about its filmic content; specifically, concerns were raised about a scene featuring a police raid on a Black Power meeting (Hassan 2011). The filmmakers were told at the time that the film had the potential to incite racial unrest (Hassan 2011). *Pressure's* cumulative impact, however, has been more long lasting: the film is universally cited in cultural scholarship as the breakthrough polemic for black British cinema.

Made just two years after *Pressure*, *Black Joy* (Anthony Simmons, 1976) was another significant point for black filmmaking in Britain, with the film being the first to feature an all black cast. While not overtly political at first glance, the film in the main depicts its troubled characters as making the best of their lives within an existing oppressive socio-political framework as opposed to seeking an alternative existence. This stance can be interpreted as an implicit political statement in itself. And while not without fault, *Black Joy* made race the central concern of the film and its location in Brixton had considerable allure as it was set in one of the few districts that retained the kind of working class culture director Simmons recalled from his childhood, albeit an Afro Caribbean as opposed to a Jewish one (Newland, 2010: 81).

#### Thatcherism and Political Responses to Racial Tension in Britain 1970 -

Throughout the late 60's and 70's, white Britain had continued to argue fiercely over the British political attitudes towards race, against a background of complete silence from those most directly affected by existing and forthcoming political discourses in relation to the issue. These policies involved on the one hand, the redrafting of the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1972, which stated only holders of work permits or people with parents or grandparents born in the UK could gain entry into Britain in an attempt to significantly reduce immigration from Commonwealth countries, and on the other, the Race Relations Act of 1976, the establishment of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) to police it, and policies specifically designed to recognise and celebrate minority cultures and contain anti-racist politics in the UK (Fryer 2003:

232). However, it was not until the early 1980's that Britain's ethnic minority communities themselves would finally find a voice that could be heard. It can be argued that this voice was one that found resonance in reaction to the existing racism in Britain, as opposed to through a multicultural practice that was put in place to ameliorate the very racism that oppressed them (McSmith 2010: 168).

This racism that emerged in 1970's Britain was constructed through a rejection of immigration, built on the momentum captured by Enoch Powell in his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech on 20 April 1968 in which he warned of what he believed would be the consequences of continued, unregulated immigration to Britain. Conservative leader Edward Heath sacked Powell from his Shadow Cabinet the following day, and although by the late 1970's Powell was no longer a Conservative MP, his influence over-shadowed the party, covering all who shared with his views on immigration in the form of the infamous Monday Club (McSmith 2010: 207). Although no member of parliament was an active member of this collective, its fierce influence on the backbenches of the Tory party meant that whatever means the government adopted to regulate immigration into the UK were labelled insufficient by the Club's extreme right wing expectations (McSmith 2010: 208). Concurrently, rising neo fascist organisations like the National Front were demanding all people of non-white skin colour should be forcefully removed from Britain, but having yet to be elected, and in an effort to seduce disillusioned liberals, Tory policy simply could not be that draconian. The Tory manifesto of 1979 stated that:

We will help those immigrants who genuinely wish to leave this country, but there can be no question of compulsory repatriation' (McSmith 2010: 209).

However, some years later, a now in power Margaret Thatcher stated:

People are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people of a different culture. The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and has done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, then people are going to be rather hostile to those coming in. We are a British nation, with British characteristics. Every country can take some minorities, and in many ways they add a richness and



variety to this country. But the moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened (McSmith 2010: 214).

Thus, the immigration debate was never actually about immigration per se, it was in fact about race and identity. This was coupled with the default rhetoric that the UK was overcrowded and could hold no more immigrants, a notion utterly divorced from reality – more people emigrated during the 1970s and 1980's than were permitted entry. Thus the UK population remained static, being 55.9 million in 1971 and 56.4 million in 1981 (McSmith 2010: 217).

In this racialised climate, there were very few opportunities for ethnic minorities, particularly the 550,000 immigrants of West Indian heritage, to establish careers. Generally, to be black was to be unemployed or underemployed, to live in substandard accommodation in inner city council housing and to attend the very worst, oversubscribed and underperforming state schools. The growing number of Asians that were paradoxically succeeding in Thatcher's climate of narcissistic entrepreneurialism were denied recognition for their efforts and remained on the periphery of society. During recession, ethnic minorities were hit the hardest, with unemployment amongst black people up to 82.5% in February 1981 (Fryer 2003: 441). To be young and black also meant living with the perpetual risk of arrest on the slightest pretext and the frightening prospect of white racism, either civic or systemic. A Home Office study at the time concluded that while blacks were 36 times more likely to suffer racism than whites, the police had since consistently failed to address this issue with any genuine conviction (McSmith 2010: 218).

The first demonstration of change was a campaign called Scrap Sus, which came to prominence in the late 1970s. The Metropolitan Police has been maximising the 1834 Vagrancy Act, which effectively granted omnipotence to them in allowing them to stop and search civilians on the mere suspicion that they may be planning criminal activity. In 1978, 3,800 were arrested on this pretext, the vast majority being black (McSmith 2010: 218). The campaign against this legalised practice became so forceful that one of the very first legislations introduced by the incoming Tory party was to repeal the Vagrancy Act, to the dismay of the Monday Club backbenchers.

This triumph introduced blacks to the idea that they no longer had to withstand police harassment and active mobilisation could lead to a degree of social change.

Black British culture had been shown before on the cinema screen before *Babylon*. *Black Joy* featured an all black cast, and was filmed on the streets of Brixton. But, like *Black Joy*, *Babylon* was the work of a white director, Franco Rosso. The film follows a group of young black reggae sound system artists in reacting with defiance and retribution to the everyday racism they encounter. Their resistance is also articulated through their politicised music, in particular, in the final scene where they barricade themselves in a warehouse to prevent a police raid. What is significant is that the original *Babylon* script, written by Martin Stellman was initially commissioned as a *Play for Today*, until the BBC refrained from producing it on the grounds that the treatment of the subject of racial discrimination was potentially inflammatory within the existing political climate (Newland 2010: 95).

It was then financed by Mamoun Hassan at the National Film Financing Corporation, primarily backing the film with £297, 525, with an additional contribution of £16,537.50. A deal was then negotiated by producer Gavrik Losey with Chrysalis records to provide further funds in exchange for 8.5% stake in the equity of the film, with Chrysalis committing an initial £30,000, bringing the total budget to £375,000, being the only film financed by the NFFC that year (Newland 2010:97). What was also significant about the films funding is that Hassan had agreed to provide 83% of the funding for the film; under normal practice, the NFFC would provide just 30% of the films budget (Hassan, M: 2011). The film was shot by a highly regarded cinematographer Chris Menges who, having previously shot *Kes* (Ken Loach, 1969) and *Black Jack*, continued with that very camerawork that lent *Kes* its social realist quality.

*Babylon* was controversially awarded an X certificate by the censor, James Freeman. His rationale was both patronising and pathologising; black youths would feel anger, resentment and further alienation from mainstream society. Through the realistic instances of institutional racism in the form of police brutality and depictions of racist abuse suffered at the hands of resentful neighbours, Freeman believed that black youths may see that retributive violence against whites was their only option available in withstanding racism. Thus, the film made a total of £91, 204.26 (Hassan 2011). In effect, the certificate reduced the film's exposure to members of the

black community who potentially could be galvanised by the film's message of defiance. This also indicated that the film establishment identified the poignancy, power, and threat the film posed to the status quo.

Although *Babylon* set out to accurately tell the story of everyday racism within the narrative of south London black youth culture, the actual filmmakers were not black. This fact makes it difficult to talk about the film in terms of *black* British cinema. But the filmmakers clearly felt that the fact that they shared the views of the immigrants in the city allowed them to transcend race. The final scene in which the police's attempt to close down the party is met by resistance was not simply a metaphor; it was a call to arms to repel state oppression.

*Burning an Illusion* (Menelik Shabazz, 1981) can be considered as deriving from *Babylon*, although its narrative trajectory shares a greater co-relation with *Pressure*. Pat, a young, intelligent girl from London rejects aspirations of assimilating into a comfortable bourgeois existence and becomes absorbed in black politics after her black boyfriend is sentenced to prison for reacting violently to police brutality. What was being articulated through this narrative and others belonging to this cycle is that assimilation into mainstream British society for ethnic minorities is futile within the existing racially oppressive climate, and a politicised approach to black identity is the only way to effectively bring forward social change, although this will result in a life on the periphery. A significant feature in the film is how Shabazz locates his female protagonist at the centre of the narrative, as opposed to secondary characters on the fringes of the story as is often the case in films about the black experience. Further, Shabazz bestows the characters a degree of agency; they are not solely political figures in a polemic filmic statement. The characters and their motivations exist and advance within the narrative frameworks of a love story.

These films herald the possibility of a new type of relation of representation between blacks and the hegemonic white society. The films were made possible by a grant-aided sector independent of the mainstream industry (primarily created by the British Film Institute Production Board). The concentrated energy that pervade both *Pressure* and *Burning an Illusion*, as well as their formal freedom, would not have survived a commissioning process by the established, white gatekeepers of the mainstream film industry. Unfortunately, the grant-aided sector did not have

the resources to give the films anything but a limited theatrical release, which was limited still further to screens that could show only 16mm rather than the standard 35mm films, so their potential socio-cultural impact was severely reduced. The few breakthrough movies depicting racial tensions and the black community authentically did not become anything like a cultural movement in British cinema.

#### The Greater London Council and the Emergence of Channel 4

The 80s proved to be the key breakthrough period for Black British film-makers, not merely in breaking the barriers of stereotypical representation of Black characters and culture, but in finding their own voice to express and debate issues affecting black communities from a black perspective. However to further understand the socio-political content of Black British filmmaking, we must contextualise this in relation to the uprisings in Britain in the early eighties.

On six occasions in less than five years up to September 1980 officers of the special patrol group SPG poured into Brixton, setting up road blocks and making early morning raids and random street checks without consulting local liaison groups or elected representatives, or even informing local police before dispatching officers in. Sooner or later, some confrontation between the police and local black youths were inevitable (Vinen 2010: 88). On 11 April 1981, some of the most notorious rioting in the history of the UK took place in Brixton, an area that became a synonym for marginalized black urban culture. The previous day, a crowd of 40 black youths rescued a colleague from a police car, bloodied from being involved in a fight. Believing he had been the victim of police brutality, a standoff proceeded, and forced police reinforcements to withdraw. This prompted an explosion of violence. In the 6 days prior, the police had launched Operation Swamp 81, where 10 squads of about 5-11 officers swarmed Brixton's streets every night between 2pm and 11pm for a week during which 120 plain clothed officers stopped 943 people, arresting 118 of them. Shops were smashed and looted, cars burned and bricks and petrol bombs thrown. 279 police officers were injured, 145 buildings were damaged, and 82 arrests were made (McSmith 2010: 223). Later in the same year, further unrest occurred in Handsworth in Birmingham, Bristol, Moss Side and Toxteth. The public inquiry led by Lord

Scarman, published on 25 November 1981, declared that racial disadvantage was a simple but shameful fact of current British life (Vinen 2010: 89).

While Scarman's enquiry recognised the problem of disproportionate policing, it rejected any charges of institutional racism, blaming the riots on the African Caribbean's supposed predisposition towards criminality, youth delinquency and single parent families. Unconsidered was the effects of the 1981 British Nationality Act that restricted the rights of the spouses, mostly the husbands, of already immigrated families to settle in Britain (Fryer 2003: 294). His recommendations were that government involvement should take the form solely of implementing a multicultural solution to unemployment and substandard education. Previously, charges of racism were widely regarded as an unhelpful accusation – unjustifiably inflammatory and engineered as part of an underhanded strategy developed by ethnic minorities in competition for attention and government resources. However, Scarman's report became the genesis for a comprehensive, grounded political programme of accommodating cultural minority needs with the sole objective of neutralising aggressive anti racist disquiet (Vinen 2010: 90).

The actual political climate became conducive for certain government initiatives to be implemented within the media establishment. The filmmakers who emerged during this period did so as a result of the civil uprisings in the early 1980's in London, Liverpool and Bristol. Broadcasters and television crews attempting to report on the unrest in the country's most deprived regions were returning to the newsrooms with vandalised cameras and no tangible footage as, being a different race to the inhabitants, they were singled out and denied access. What resulted were the first instances of a concerted effort to open the door to the employment of middle class black filmmakers at the BBC, ITV and other regional broadcasters such as LWT, Granada and Yorkshire TV, on the premise that the ethnicity of the reporters and filmmakers would allow them greater, uncontested access to the scenes of the urban unrest. There was a rush of the employment of black journalists in the documentary and factual departments, who then formed black media workers organisations and collectives (Henriques, J :2011).

This process of black access was implemented by the radical Labour administration of the Greater London Council (GLC) from 1982 until its abolition, as a result of central government legislation, in 1986. Led by a far left politician called Ken Livingstone, who was just 33 at the

time, the GLC's equality agenda was unparalleled. Beyond mere expediency, the GLC took up justifiable demands for black representation in political decision-making and created a new phase of local democracy involving constituencies previously marginalized from mainstream party politics. At its cultural level, the GLC also inaugurated a new attitude to funding arts activities by regarding them as stand alone, cultural industries in their own right. Both these developments proved important for the burgeoning black independent film sector (Mercer 1988: 35). By essentializing black cultural initiatives either by direct subsidy or through training and development policies, the GLC marked a break with the piecemeal and often patronizing 'ethnic arts categorisation'. In 1982, the GLC sponsored a conference to re-evaluate black artists access to media production, where they were critically targeted by black artists because of the way they felt they underfunded their creative endeavours. More crucially, it seemed that they privileged white producers when representing black issues to the public (Mercer, 1988: 35).

While many artistes benefitted from funds generated by the GLC, there were still some black organisations that would not come to an institutionally sponsored event; it was compromising their political position. *Race Today* and *Race and Class* both refused money from the GLC as they wanted to retain their independence (Vir, 2012). Others did not want to be labelled as 'minority artists', with the notion of being viewed as minor angering many black artists afraid of being marginalised as problems to be nurtured and guided in British society. They challenged this idea of multiculturalism, which essentially collapsed separate artistic and cultural forms into one without real consideration for individual difference. What must be recognised is that multiculturalism was not demanded by ethnic minorities - what was desired was cultural recognition, equal access to the means of film production and wider representation in the industry. They wanted funding and access to the *mainstream* arts institutions. However, the multicultural discourse within Britain's cultural institutions represented an attempt to pacify potential artistic attacks on the hegemonic forms of racism prevalent at the time. Thus, state multiculturalism proved to be the velvet glove over the iron fist of anti racist filmmaking, with multiculturalism's role being to negate all forms of racial thinking despite the overwhelming evidence.

The newly established Channel Four were also criticized for not taking greater strides to address black audiences through shows such as *Black on Black*, and *Eastern Eye*. There was a need for shows to be counter hegemonic, portraying a different picture of the black experience to ITV shows like *Love Thy Neighbor*, *Mind Your Language* and *Mixed Blessings*, which displayed racist stereotypes of black people in Britain. The GLC and Channel Four responded by setting aside funds for training black youth in their chosen mediums, with the objective to develop a film language that could specifically address the black experience in Britain (Mercer 1988:36).

Another objective of the GLC was around policy and strategy. This involved creating research papers, which explored options for implementing pressure on arts institutional policy making. The GLC wanted institutions like the BFI and the National Theatre, who applied for funding through the main Arts and Recreational Funding Group, to demonstrate how they would make their funding, employment, and programmes cater for black and Asian artists and communities. At the time they had no policy on black British filmmakers, or artists. There was no programming on international Black cinema. The GLC's grant giving powers allowed them to make demands on representation in front of and behind the camera and equal opportunities. The broader objective was not to assimilate into institutions such as the BFI, but to create a black audience, who could engage in dialogue with the emerging black filmmakers and to participate in the workshops. Parallel to this, they wanted to use the power of film to tell their stories. They had seen the African Americans films of Charles Burnett and Heidi Graham and had been influenced by them.

Parminder Vir, who was Head of the Ethnic Arts Unit, had organised the Black Film Festival in 1981 during her tenure at the Commonwealth Institute. She teamed up with the NFT to bring black filmmakers from America to Britain for the festival. Her objective was to continue this approach within the GLC. In 1983, as a follow up to the festival, she organised the Third Eye Film Festival of World Cinema. This moved the emphasis away from solely black American cinema to that of Cuba, Chile, and India. It was a two-week programme of films and filmmakers on a GLC platform at the Bloomsbury Theatre. As these events all occurred in the first half of the 1980s, assisted through exposure to create a British audience for Black film, this exposure

encouraged a number of independent UK film production companies to form such as Penumbra Productions and Ancey Films.

Devised by the Association of Film and Television Technicians (ACTT), the Workshop Declaration was one of a number of reforms in the early 80s with the objective of redressing the increasing class and racial divisions in Britain. The Workshop Declaration was a groundbreaking agreement made in 1982 in consultation with the English Regional Arts Associations, the Welsh Arts Council, the BFI and Channel Four, identifying the alternative practices of the workshops and encouraging them to make a cultural, a social and crucially, a political contribution to society. This declaration was at the time considered a radical step for what was a traditionally narrowly focused union, and established specific working practices in the non-profit, cultural sector. Collectives of four or more full-time members whose funding derived from public revenue and who engaged in non-commercial work on a not-for-profit platform could be enfranchised by the workshops and given aid for a period of up to three years, thus liberating them from the arduous and time consuming task of searching for insecure short term funding from the mainstream arts institutions (Baker, 1996: 112).

The Workshop Declaration was decreed to include distribution, educational activities and the provision of film and video equipment, alongside production work. It also provided full-time, frequent employment for practitioners working in each workshop. A crucial requirement was that the franchised workshops should be drawn from outside the mainstream of film and television culture - with a particular focus on ethnic diversity and a commitment to socio-political issues.

The GLC began to apply pressure to the ACT union (now BECTU) to change their policies on membership and representation. In order to secure employment the film industry union membership was required, which black people could not obtain because they did not have the relevant experience or credits. The GLC took on the unions and forced change by pushing young black filmmakers into the workshop sector, which got public funding for community use. This enabled them to gain credits and achieve union representation. The GLC approached four collectives, Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC), Sankofa, Ceddo and Retake, and they adopted the workshop model as a way of achieving union recognition. Rules were changed in order to



fund these collectives. In particular, Black Audio Film Collective were able to finance 100% of their first film, offices and equipment.

Again, we must consider the political context to understand the urgency demonstrated by the GLC in funding these film workshops. The GLC were a tiny island in a sea of Conservatism. The political pressure they were under from the Tory government meant that they had a very limited window in which they could achieve a cultural impact. In 1984, GLC became aware that they were about to be abolished, giving them just over a year to get as much done as possible before the March 1986 closure. What they wanted was to leave behind legacies that would sustain beyond the GLC closure. Within the GLC, the strategy was now to distribute as much money externally as possible and to push through funding applications. An Afro-Caribbean sub committee was created to ensure that applications were viewed and considered by black and Asian people. A further objective was to ensure that black artists got to perform and exhibit their work at all GLC events. It was not merely expediency; it was the politics of society at this time that they were expressing, where the crucial goal was to get the money into the hands of those filmmakers that they had identified. Their budget had begun at £300,000; by 1985 it was £4,000,000 (Vir, 2012).

The rationale behind these GLC funded workshops was to empower emerging black filmmakers by bestowing them with the means of establishing an autonomous production structure, permitting them to explore original filmmaking aesthetics and discourse that differed from the standardising and co-opting pressures of the dominant commercial market. These workshops marked an essential stage in the evolution of black and Asian British filmmakers towards self-definition and self-expression. In order to measure black workshop films' impact at a cultural level it is first necessary to understand their political economy. The filmmakers were expected to be experimental, as opposed to achieving commercial success. They formed a component of a wider politico-cultural policy in which the imperative was to empower ethnic minority voices and permitting them to determine their own stylistic approach and discourse.

However, the most crucial factor in the emergence of black filmmaking into the mainstream was the establishment of Channel 4 television in 1982. Channel 4 was conceived in terms of an extension of the boundaries and parameters of filmic and televisual representation, in terms of

subject matter towards the periphery of British society and finding appropriate devices for this. At its advent, the brief was to represent the diversity of British voices. They were comparatively open to political pressure and had a particular remit, differing from the BBC, much more diverse in its programming and representation (Henriques 2011). Programmes devised specifically for black and ethnic minority filmmaking development emerged in the 80s via Channel 4's regional workshops, with Sue Woodford appointed as the first commissioning editor for multi-cultural programming. The 1982 Channel 4 launch brochure declared that:

Channel 4 will portray Britain as the multi-racial society it is, encouraging different ethnic groups to speak to us, entertain us, tell us how they perceive the world we share (Hobson 2007: 26).

Sue Woodford continued by stating that:

Black communities in the UK are very angry and they have very tough things to say about British society and the way the system works. If black film is to be authentic and actually acceptable to a black audience then it must have black involvement in the investment, the production, the casting and scripting, the editing and the receivership, that deals with issues at the forefront of the black community as opposed to the liberal white concerns over black identity and issues (Hobson 2007: 26).

On the back of this declaration, she set up training schemes and courses, with the objective of generating a bigger production base in the future. Woodford saw this as an important component of her remit as she discovered the existence of a shortage of professionally trained black or Asian people working in television. In an effort to reverse this lack of representation in TV, affirmative action was used to create behind the camera positions for people from ethnic minorities on her commissioned programmes. Crucially, existing film organisations like Ceddo, Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa remained largely amateur and voluntary-run collectives, yet were identified as important locations for the implementation of Channel 4's demanding talent development objectives, as they provided a direct link to the very ethnic minorities they were targeting.

As the channel had no production facilities of its own and independent companies produced all of its output, the independent filmmakers identified Channel 4 as a means to bring controversial work to a wider audience, as well as securing funding for alternative practices. The station was decreed to facilitate programming for minority audiences by the Broadcasting Act of 1980, and as members of the Independent Filmmakers Association were present on the Production Board, the independent film and video artists possessed a degree of influence in its overall direction and shape. Channel 4, with its particular remit gave the parties the required funding to seal an agreement to the benefit of the independent film and video sector. The channel, which in usual circumstances commissioned on a per-programme basis, agreed to provide sustained funding for selected workshops. Channel 4 assisted in helping shape and implement the workshop agreement. Of immediate significance was that Channel 4 valued the cultural and socio-political ideologies of its targeted groups, allowing the collectives to operate on a purely creative terrain whilst crucially, the agreement stipulated that the film collective, and not the commissioner would own sole copyright to the work (Baker, 1996:116).

The close relationship between the groups and the Channel was conducive to achieving a clarity and unity of ideas, through Channel 4's regional workshops led by the Commissioning Editor for Independent Film and Video, Alan Fountain. The workshops financed a tangible, organisational relationship between mainstream institutions and young filmmakers who, conscious of the socio-political conflicts of the period, could exercise their own socio-political viewpoint through the aesthetics of film. Channel 4 gave Black Audio Film Collective, Ceddo Film & Video Workshop, Retake, and Sankofa Film and Video the creative platform to distribute their perspectives to the mainstream public. The shared objective was to train blacks and Asians with skills for entry into the film and television sectors. It was not just aesthetics and a stylistic approach that united these collectives with Channel 4, but politics, ideology and a community of political ideas, manifest in a collective desire to develop a filmic practice, which attacked the dominant representations of black experiences. There existed a consensus that Britain's black community had been miss-represented by the media and that the time was right to produce fresher methods of framing the black and Asian experience. There also existed a distinctive energy and urgency within the collectives because they had previously been forced to operate on the periphery of both the film industry and British society.

At the time, while many believed that Channel 4 would provide a rare opportunity for the broadcast of black and ethnic minority film, there were fears that political pressure from the Conservative government might inhibit more polemical work from being broadcast. However, this era produced the most politically and aesthetically uncompromising Black films, which attacked racism at a time when increasing frustration and anger with discrimination and police brutality led to riots in Brixton, Birmingham and elsewhere, and it is believed to be a major high point in black British black expression through film (Diaware 1993: 66). Black Audio Film Collective interrogated colonialist representations in projects such as *Expeditions*, and *Images of Nationality* before producing *Handsworth Songs* - a documentary which presented the Birmingham suburb's riots in relation to the turmoil of Thatcher-era oppressions. Sankofa, set up in summer 1983 by Martina Attile, Maureen Blackwood, Isaac Julien and Nadine Marsh-Edwards, produced key films such as *Who Killed Colin Roach*, *Territories* and *The Passion of Remembrance*, a drama which investigated homosexual identity and experience in the context of race, providing a varied perspective on contemporary Black experiences. In addition, Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa undertook education activities and film programming as well as production; having gained wider audiences with the help of Channel 4's funding initiatives that promoted multiculturalism, it was imperative to leave the avenue open for future black filmmakers and moving image collectives to emerge. These initiatives included 16mm workshops for black women, the results of which were broadcast on the Channel.

While the funding provided by Channel 4 was initially directed towards the workshop sector, by the mid 1980s a more concentrated film and video culture had a presence on the channel, with opportunities created for filmmakers in the slots made available by *The Eleventh Hour*, which during its run broadcast programmes devoted to the films and videos from the workshop movement. The creation of this plurality on TV, specifically provision for politically aligned ethnic minority film and video, eventually influenced the BBC, which as a result became much more diverse in its commissioning and focus on inclusion.

## New Labour and the Language of Diversity

In September 1985, police stopped an unemployed twenty four year old named Floyd Jarrett in a car in Tottenham, wrongly believing that the car was stolen. They then came to his home on the Broadwater Farm Estate, looking for stolen property. His mother, Cynthia, who weighed 20st, was prepared to co-operate but an argument broke out and she was pushed, falling and dying of a heart attack. On Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October her relatives led a peaceful protest march towards Tottenham police station. However, by 9pm it was clear that the area was on the verge of erupting. A police officer was later shot, and at around 10:15, PC Keith Blacklock was surrounded and stabbed to death. At this point, Conservative MPs called for the restoration of the death penalty (McSmith 2010: 225). While this riot did not weaken Tory party policy, those who wanted to improve the circumstances of Britain's ethnic minorities turned to more constructive methods. The Labour Party began to feel the presence of very determined black activists. Patricia Hewitt, who had become Neil Kinnock's press secretary in 1983 was lobbied by a small contingent of recently elected members, two being Sharon Atkin and Diane Abbott. They persuaded her that the way to get around the reluctance of black and Asian communities to engage in activities dominated by whites was to create separate groups for them - in effect, ethnicising them (McSmith 2010: 227).

By the mid 80's, when films like *Territories* (Isaac Julien, 1984) and *Passion of Remembrance* (Isaac Julien 1986) gained international acclaim, it was apparent that a new film vernacular had been cultivated that shifted the narrative away from race relation discourses and into direct racial confrontation, with the objective of bringing to screen the racial antagonisms experienced by blacks in British society. The solidarity that developed amongst blacks and Asians during the late 70's and 80's because of the racist policies, policing and marginalisation, created a pressure that needed an outlet, and that became a creative outlet.

By the late 80's, immigration was no longer the political issue it had previously been. The collapse of the Soviet Union discredited the idea of any alternative to free market capitalism. Thus, the Tories were more concerned with maximising British prosperity in the global market and the threat to British sovereignty posed by the European Union. The Monday Club remained, but its influence was now minimal and the political class had now turned away from such overt

expressions of hostility towards ethnic minorities, with the new Prime Minister John Major attempting to ensure at least one black Conservative MP would be elected in the next election.

A key policy that the outgoing Prime Minister pushed through that would leave a lasting legacy on the direction of the British film industry was the British Broadcasting Act of 1990. In particular, the 1990 Broadcasting Act and a change to Channel 4's funding agreement in 1993 were significant in shaping the Channel's future; the financial stability afforded to Channel 4 by its unique funding mechanism meant that it had no immediate concerns over attracting a majority audience. For ten years it had the unique luxury of establishing itself with any programmes which it wished to provide, because it was not configured as a commercial channel. With the levy from the ITV companies removed, the reality that the Channel was not financially independent and now in direct competition with the BBC shifted its emphasis from creating controversial programming for minority Britain to that which allured mainstream Britain to the channel. This had particular ramifications for black filmmakers who had benefitted from nearly ten years of financial support from the channel – ethnicised filmmaking was no longer Channel 4's paramount concern.

In regard to the changes that took place after this period, there is no general consensus beyond the claim that there was a huge ideological shift at Channel 4. There is a debate here between academics and commentators who favour what in this context can be described as a de-alignment thesis (wherein the relationship between Channel 4 and its original remit has broken down because of the acceptance of commercialism, to the detriment of ethnic minorities and the working class) and those who subscribe to a re-alignment thesis (where the working class and ethnic minorities have become depoliticized through changes in living standards and the expansion of the middle class, and there is no longer a need for the original remit to be adhered to. But in the context of the triangulation that is politics, film, and its effects, the shift must be understood in terms of the class-race nexus within neoliberalism.

However, despite these changes, black filmmakers continued to explore themes of race and exclusion in films such as *Young Soul Rebels* (1991, Isaac Julien). While there are numerous flaws in the script, in particular the attempts to amalgamate themes of race, sexuality and national identity, the film represented a continuation of the politicized films of the previous decade, and in using the characters' relationships to provide the political commentary in the film,

it demonstrated a standalone artistic statement of how existing racist practices continue to arrest the development of ethnic minorities in Britain. However, *Young Soul Rebels* signaled an end point in the development of the black film culture from formal and discursive exploration within non-mainstream films, towards a more populist, traditional narrative cinema with the sole intention of attracting wider audience. Well-received at the Cannes Film Festival, where it garnered a Best Film award from the French Society of Authors, the film was a commercial failure in the UK because it was not successful in crossing over to the emerging black youth market.

The film was not heralded by the industry as a triumph for British cinema, but conversely to many, as an anathema. The desired image of Britain was of heritage and tranquillity, and there was no space for black filmmakers to effectively forge careers in the film industry, or even get their work to a wider audience. The Foreign Office declined to fund black British films at the 1992 Carthage Film Festival specifically because they were deemed not likely to be representative of the kind of British cinema, and the British society that wanted (Murphy 2000: 198). Devoid of funding as a result of changes in the cultural policies of local authorities, including the Greater London Authority (whose grant awarding framework differed from that of the GLC) and disregarded by the increasingly commercially-orientated Channel 4, many workshops that emerged in the 80's were dissolved during the 90s, leaving a temporary but significant cultural void in black self-representation through cinema (Vir 2012). It was not until the mid to late 90's that cultural institutions emphasis clearly shifted to 'open doors' for those specifically from ethnic minority backgrounds. They began to incorporate wider political aims into their own objectives, using terms like 'equality', 'diversity' and 'underprivileged', which mirrored the developing New Labour rhetoric.

From the 50's there were a series of shifts in dominant political discourse from assimilation to multiculturalism to racial equality, with further shifts during New Labours time in office. Throughout the 70's and 80's, the default critique from the right of multiculturalism had been that it is a corrosive of national identity. In Tony Blair's vision, diversity without integration within Britain constituted a genuine threat to social cohesion unless it could be subsumed to a

civic integration model defined through a nationalist perspective of a desirable and undesirable diversity, stating that:

Integration is not about culture or lifestyle. It is about values, it is about integrating at the point of shared, common unifying British values. It is not about what defines us a people, but as Citizens (Rawnsley 2001: 300).

Within this rhetoric, multiculturalism needed to be reconfigured as a form of liberal nationalism (Rawnsley 2001: 300). Thus, diversity as a form of governmentality is publically and officially aggrandised but only in methods and forms that define its self-interest within the government's self-interest. But to understand the genesis, motivation, and effects of New Labour multiculturalism, we must first consider it as the by-product of *Post-Macpherson-ism*. Once in power, Jack Straw, in his role as Home Secretary, commissioned an inquiry into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, which the Conservatives had previously refused to do. On 22 April 1993 Lawrence was stabbed to death while waiting with a friend at a bus stop in, Woolwich, South London in an unprovoked attack motivated by racial animus. The Metropolitan Police were heavily criticised for their conduct of the investigation. After fifteen years of campaigning by Stephen's parents, Straw announced a Judicial Inquiry in July 1997 to be led by Sir William Macpherson. The findings of what was known as the *Macpherson Report*, published on 24 February 1999, asserted that the Metropolitan Police investigation into the murder was "marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers" (Thomas 2011: 65). Macpherson made 70 recommendations with the objective of eliminating racist prejudice and disadvantage in "all aspects of policing." The Macpherson Report also asserted that the recommendations of the 1981 Scarman Report had not been implemented. More crucially, while the Scarman report concluded that "institutional racism" was not a reality in Britain, the Macpherson report concluded unequivocally that the police force was "institutionally racist" (Craig 2008: 112).

Not only did this report create the context for subjecting the police to Race relations legislation, the Macpherson Report informed the 2000 Race Relation Amendment Act which effectively



required public authorities to adopt a much more structured and proactive stance against discrimination and race equality in the workplace (Rawnsley 2001:212). Specifically, this act introduced the potentially groundbreaking Equality Impact Assessments for all public bodies, requiring them to demonstrate that they are actively combating racism and promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations in all areas of their employment practices and service provision (Thomas 2011: 66).

One of the major objectives for New Labour was the reversal of this trend of discrimination through social inclusion and opportunity. Tony Blair mainly chose to focus on education, employment and cultural activity, with culture in particular being seen as a viable means of regenerating urban areas and providing employment. The Government's central belief was that an apparent black monopoly on oppression could be corrected by artistic involvement. Providing cultural solutions to apparent cultural problems would, it was hoped, have the triple effect of dampening the voices of second generation migrants contesting state racism, increasing employment and reducing poverty and refocusing delinquent energies into something tangible (Bharvashi 2007: 67). In wider society however, poverty for the poorest in society that had increased during the Conservative government of the 80s and early 90s, continued unabated.

Policy moves towards multiculturalism appeared largely rhetorical and were seen by critics as naïve and liberal in their casual assumption that racism was holistically based on personal ignorance of the cultures of the 'other' (Thomas 2011: 67). There was also a belief that the multiculturalist policy approaches to race relations in previous decades had deepened the divides between ethnic communities. The key principle of the new community cohesion work was that of activities bringing people together through culture, specifically the arts, rather than political discussions about racism.

## The UK Film Council and Diversity Within British Film

The New Labour project represented a comprehensive, grounded political programme of accommodating cultural minority needs with the ultimate objective of neutralising aggressive anti racist disquiet. However, ensuring equality in terms of education and employment outcomes and in community facilities for ethnic communities took priority over concerted, political movements against racism. This was in effect a benevolent and essentially paternalistic perspective, but this more permissive, liberal view prevailed. The UKFC was formed in 1997, and signified the New Labour government's intention to intervene in the organisation of film to a growing extent. It's main aims initially were to provide facilities and encourage participation on a wide community level, but the suggestion that they continued to regard cinema as serving particular political and societal functions was most clearly highlighted in the main locations and target groups of their increasing intervention, targeting the 'disadvantaged' of the inner cities. During this period, the recognised disadvantaged groups were identified as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. Whilst funding provision came to be set aside for the development of participation in all of these groups, it was towards ethnic minorities, specifically those from the most economically deprived sections of society, where the need for access was particularly identified (Bhavnani 2007: 70).

The continuous exclusion of ethnic minorities became one of the most problematic issues for the UKFC during this time. This was manifested in their two main objectives: i) to develop ethnic talent, and ii) to change the culture of British film, essentially to target audiences from all backgrounds whom they wished to attract. To achieve more ethnic minority participation, British film had to broaden its appeal to these diverse sections of the population, namely the lower classes, many of whom were of an ethnic minority. Because the industry was considered as being the preserve of middle-class, white, middle-aged men and women, and further because the Arts Council were essentially the custodians of public revenue via its funding from the National Lottery, the UKFC viewed ethnic minorities as crucial in their plans, and ethnicised film organisations and collectives became the target for several development proposals.

Government authorities and New Labour began searching for ways to replace the out-dated discourse of multiculturalism adopted by the GLC, manifested by compartmentalised and ethnicised arts funding with a more contemporary mode of identifying difference that had the

potential to be reconciled with a focus on cohesion. The change in emphasis also involved advocating moving away from the single group support to initiatives that encouraged these groups to become less singular and more amalgamated. As a result, the Arts Council partnered 21 film industry organisations in devising a Leadership in Diversity forum and created the first ever Equalities Charter for film, and subsequently the Equalities Charter for Film Programme for Action. The Charter pledged six clear aims including:

- identifying the barriers to the industry
- encouraging communities to enjoy film culture
- welcoming employment from all communities
- encouraging all to remain in the industry
- developing and adopting equality and diversity policies
- taking steps to increase on-screen diversity (Bhavnani 2007: 78)

The Film Council's five board members, Alan Parker, Stuart Till, Tim Bevan, Paul Webster, and Parminder Vir took diversity agenda into the Film Council, mainstreaming black film talent and ensuring at least 1-2 black officers within the Diversity Sub-Committee in the New Cinema Fund. In October 2000, out of a paper Vir wrote for the Board, the Diversity Agenda emerged, which in turn resulted in the appointment of a Diversity Officer, Marcia Williams (Vir 2012).

From the early 2000s, the Film Council initiated a number of schemes to widen participation, remove barriers to participation, eradicate social exclusion and change the culture of British Film & TV, with social being racial, rather than economic, meaning that in line with the growing concern for ethnic inclusion in film, ethnic minorities alone became a focal point for film diversity attention. While this resulted in schemes and opportunities being made available for ethnic minorities from low-income areas, the white working class generally were not part of a wider development plan for the British film industry. Because this policy targeted the ethnic identity, as opposed to the economic status, from this position the class-discrimination argument, which suggests that people are excluded simply because they are in fact working class, can be legitimised. Essentially, it seemed to imply a dichotomous mode of thinking, whereby the experiences of blacks and of whites were regarded as mutually exclusive.

There existed a fundamental problem with this discourse. In explaining social exclusion in British film culture in relation to one's race, they conceptualised the issue around simple dichotomies, solely between whites and ethnic minorities. This distinction is found not only to be inaccurate, but also false; it presents a distinction cultivated to divide society into sections that are not entirely exclusive and quintessential - it assumes that exclusion is a cultural rather than a class reality, and that it is *holistically* race that dominated peoples exclusion, rather than class.

The violent urban disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the north of England during the summer of 2001 were the most serious outbreaks of disorder in Britain since the inner city disturbances in the early 80's. The disturbances were seen as symptomatic of much wider problems with the state of ethnic relations nationally. The analysis of the 2001 riots provided an opportunity for policy makers to advance a new dialogue in race relations, adding a further dimension to New Labour's conceptualisation of multicultural Britain (Thomas 2011: 60). It seriously downplayed specific causal factors for the disturbances, such as far right racist political agitation. In ignoring these facts, this position had pedigree in the New Labour Third Way ideology that governments had no specific role in combating racism through anti-racist policies, and creating the space and environments within our public institutions for social cohesion and the efforts of the individual could be deployed as the new priority for race relations.

The emergence from the late 90's of a government that took an interest in film, and opportunities for financial assistance from the newly-established National Lottery brought new demands on British film governing bodies, especially those who wished to compete for grants. Funding came to be offered as a quid pro quo exchange for proposals to remove barriers to participation and promote racial inclusion within British film culture. Increased competition for funding facilitated an extension of interdependency ties between film and their representative governing bodies. The issue of racial inequality was neither raised nor deemed of paramount concern to dominant groups like the BBC at this time. So, up until the late 20th century this was most certainly not an issue of social or political importance. The competitive struggles for dominance between BBC Films & Film Four led to numerous unintended consequences, which influenced the general direction in which black British films developed. The BBC, for example, were *forced* to be competitive with other governing bodies on an economic (and more crucially) a representational level, as well as in terms of attracting commercially viable scripts. Thus, they also underwent a

distinct internal morphing, as a result becoming much more diverse and focused on inclusion. Principally, these structural changes were implemented by coercion; the consequences of the wider social processes. However, the marginalised groups themselves had little power to label their own exclusion as a problem, and the power of groups acting on their behalf, if there were any, was comparatively small. Essentially, they had insufficient power chances to effectively challenge their marginalisation cinematically and, as such, it was not until the very end of the 20th century before the inequalities within British film industry gave substantial cause for concern.

The early 90's had seen the flourishing of Hollywood films commissioned from African American filmmakers as the major studios such as Universal Pictures and Warner Bros. recognized the commercial potential of this tradition of independent filmmaking practice. Amongst the well known films of this type are the series of 'ghetto' films depicting guns, crime, violence and black youth subculture exemplified by *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989), *New Jack City* ( Mario Van Peebles, 1991) and *Boyz In the Hood* (John Singleton, 1992 ). Many of these films were dubbed 'crossover films' because they mix the cinematic techniques garnered in independent practice with mainstream generic values (Hallam 2000: 86).

This was clearly the wider ambition for *Bullet Boy* (Saul Dibb, 2005) *Life and Lyrics* (Richard Laxton, 2006) and *Rollin' With The Nines* (Julian Gibley, 2006) with the former being dubbed 'a British Boyz in the Hood'. However the difference is that there is a strand of African American independent filmmaking that adopts contemporary realist practices, using strategies that openly engage with the lived realities of urban life to depict the psychological, economical and social consequences of racism and marginalization on its characters. This is a distinct and crucial feature absent within the British offshoot.

In the light of social-reform policy throughout the early 2000's, film was seen as a vehicle through which the process of ethnic minority socialisation could be made more fluid, with cinema regarded as important in teaching young people in particular life skills and educational objectives. It is unsurprising that removing barriers to participation and preventing the social exclusion of particular groups from participating in film also became objectives for the BFI, ITV as well as the BBC and Channel 4. However, it is important to note that the objective was merely

to include, rather than to develop ethnic minority talent in ways that would allow them to display cinematic talent in an effective, long term and even-handed way.

### Case Study: *Bullet Boy*

A spate of knife and gun crimes amongst sections of the black working class youths in areas such as North West London, Hackney and parts of South London, including several widely publicised murders on the St Raphael's and Stonebridge Park estates in Harlesden revived issues of black alienation in the public consciousness. 'Postcode wars', a term used frequently to describe conflicts between youths from particular districts of London, was one of the supposed causes of the violence. Youth involvement in the drugs trade was also considered a prime factor. As a result, the Met Police, somewhat controversially, set up Operation Trident with the sole aim of investigating crime within the black communities. This racialising of crime seemed to suggest that the police regarded black on black violence as a standalone form of criminality, and as reflected in wider society, entitled to only a reduced focus.

As black-on-black violence soared, the British film world felt it was ready for something authentic and passionate, worthy and different. The middle class media approached the issue of black crime and culture like it was an intellectual issue in abstract thought. The Film Council seemed to have a desire for the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the urban world and all its connotations. If the semantics are to be considered, 'Urban' really meant crossover. The aesthetics, rather than the sociology, was now the focus. It could be assimilated, categorized, commercialised and made profitable. However, the choice of film was constantly congruent with the tastes of a middle class, educated audience looking for forms of entertainment that offer something different from the normal Hollywood fanfare or British heritage film.

Developed and financed through the BBC's drama department with an additional financial contribution from the UK Film Council's New Cinema Fund, *Bullet Boy* was directed by a white, middle class filmmaker, Saul Dibb. The film was an attempt at a social realist treatment of the milieu of disenfranchised black British urban youths: sequence shooting, and the deep focus cinematography, with an obedience and fidelity to real time, as well as the employment of

natural lighting and the hand held, almost cinema verite camera action employed to generate spontaneity, are all used to marry cast and location together and give the impression that the fictional situations emerge spontaneously from the real social context.

Under the supervision of the BBC Films producer Ruth Caleb, who had a reputation for producing improvisational television drama, the film was made using workshop techniques. This strategy was essential to achieving a cultural impact among young viewers, both black and white, by credibly rendering their lifestyles, behavioral characteristics and vernacular on screen. At a cultural level, as well as its box office gross of £450,000 and positive reviews, it prompted a constant stream of requests by schools and art house venues across the UK for educational film screenings. The film also achieved good distribution abroad, being selected for the Toronto International Film Festival and winning a Hitchcock d'Or at the Dinard Festival of British Film. The filmmakers clearly felt that they could use a quasi- social realist cinematic approach to bring forward this issue as evident in Verve Pictures press release for the film:

Its naturalistic representation of characters, time and place, and its use of authentic language have drawn comparisons with milestone British films like Ken Loach's *Kes* and Horace Ove's *Pressure* (Sin, 2008:1)

However in the main, *Bullet Boy* is not even tangentially about socio-political commentary. Gun crime has been explained as a cultural problem without any reference to sustained and structured inequality. Within *Bullet Boy*, criminality has been framed in relation to the perceived behavioural and cultural characteristics of a specific racial group; social policy is not shown as responsible for Ricky's predicament – it's the individual's inability to make suitable life choices which is to blame, and it entails no relationship between the state and ethnic minorities.

By rooting themselves in documentary aesthetics, they were attempting to observe characters through a window; however, this resulted in them defining their subjects from the outside. The onscreen result is a series of clichés that fall short of the images they were looking for, portraying mere probes and clichés rather than characters with their own history and weight. They present a character whose problems with race and class seem non-existent. It de-contextualises the drama and offers a social backdrop for *individual* relations. A political film is

not only one directly concerned with recognised political power structures, but is also likely to be, at least at surface level, critical of those structures.

However, the film appeared to have contributed to the development of a new contemporary sub-genre – the black youth-orientated film. Films within this sub genre portray a bleak inner city and a youth culture in which drugs, gun crime and youth delinquency are a daily reality. *Bullet Boy* was quickly followed by a number of films that claimed to deal with issues of black crime and gang subculture in London, presented through a number of themes such as the underground music scene or the drugs trade, such as *Life and Lyrics*, *Rollin' With the Nines*, *Kidulthood* (Menhaj Huda, 2006) *Adulthood* (Noel Clark, 2008) and *Shank* (Mo Ali, 2010). The film world's embracing of the urban film represented the worst form of white liberal guilt for the oppressed 'other'. Blacks had been making and featuring in films for decades with few critical column inches dedicated to it. Suddenly, when these films were made with the endorsement of New Labour, the BBC and Channel 4 they were aggrandised as being innovative and culturally valid. It was an arrangement that seemed to satisfy everyone; the liberal Channel 4 and the left wing liberal middle class press that were equally ashamed of Britain's aristocratic, colonial past, and the BBC desperate for absolution for decades of marginalising black arts and to avoid the perpetual fear of losing part of its licence fee to Channel 4. However, as the BBC and Channel 4 fought to become the avatar of British urban film culture, blacks themselves became not the chief contributors or the consumers, but the mere objects of middle class imaginations, steeped in pre conceived notions and anecdotes from both British liberal and right wing press. Their job was merely to feature, but not to theorize, strategize or steer it. More crucially, because of the concentration and composition of films like *Bullet Boy*, *Kidulthood*, and various TV dramas with ethnic characters, there was an inordinate pressure on each film to be representative, and say as much as possible in one filmic statement. However, this had a marginalizing effect that seemed to reinforce rather than ameliorate the otherness of the subjects. In addition, the various left, liberal and middle class media's obsession with the self - gratifying practices of respect for cultural difference found a particular expression in this form of multiculturalism in the way black films have been embraced, and a seductive property of multiculturalism is the cultural validity it affords the liberal middle class (Lentin and Titley 2011: 180). However, approaching all cultures as equal, in the sense of equivalence as opposed to equality – and hence open to criticism



remains the key flaw in the historical and current critiques of black British filmmaking, demonstrated in the critical response to *Bullet Boy*:

A shockingly stark and gritty portrait of what life is like for a young black man growing up in urban London and all the trials and tribulations that go with it. If you need a reality check, then this is a must see movie (Hannigan, 2004:1).

What gives the film such topical punch is the devastating portrait that it paints of the gun culture that has crept into our inner cities. Dibb's social drama is unsparingly frank; it's an important and impressive debut (Frith, 2004: 1).

The reluctance of film reviewers to openly criticise black filmmaking has hindered the development of an improved aesthetic, and in this case sociological quality of black cinema, which can only be achieved by exposure to a universal criteria that is unaffected patronage, hyper-liberalism and the fear of charges of racism.

At this point, we must also unpick 'black filmmaking' as a term. Sarita Malik describes the term black British film as the films “which draw on the manifold experience of, and which, for the most part are made by film-makers drawn from the Asian, African and Caribbean diaspora”, referring to the fact that by the 80s ‘black’ became an adopted umbrella term (Malik 1996: 203, 204). They did not come as empty vessels, they came with deep cultural practices and traditions and stories. They had to assume this label as this was what the institutions gave them, the prefix of black was sufficient. It was not just the colour of skin, it was the political position and where they stood in relation to the institutions. Saul Dibb is white, as were the producer, writer and director of *Babylon*. *Babylon* however effectively highlights both civic racism and institutional racism in the form of police harassment and brutality - unlike *Bullet Boy*, which attempts to investigate themes present in *Babylon* like youth unemployment and gun crime with no depth of analysis into the systemic causes of these issues, rendering the film thin and clichéd.

Within this permissive climate, a sense of expectancy existed amongst black and ethnic minority filmmakers that a lasting black film culture could finally find its stride. A default charge against essentialised funding and cultural programmes preserved for ethnic minorities was that those

producers and practitioners involved in the decision making process have lacked the cast of mind, effective organisation skills or even the interest to effectively develop a lasting black British film culture despite the scale of the opportunities they were offered, and have failed to maximise the compensatory power afforded to them. However, while provisions were made for ethnic minority inclusion in the form of film education and workshops, evidence suggests minority ethnic groups had difficulties in accessing funds for feature film development and production, rendering the numerous schemes put in place by the Film Council abortive. Of 106 applications to the Film Council's New Cinema Fund 2007, the application response rate amongst ethnic minorities was 38%. Out of the total applications, only 4% of awards went to minority ethnic applicants (so less than one in a hundred) 26% went to women (27% response rate) and none to those with a disability (8% response rate). The Premiere Fund's 99 awards comprised 3 % to ethnic minority applicants (response rate 58%), 27% to women (36% response rate), and none to disabled applicants (response rate 16%). Minority ethnic applicants received 8% of the 409 awards from the Development Fund's (response rate 60%), women took 30% (response rate 50%) and people with disabilities 7 % (response rate 15.6%) (Bhavnani 2007: 145). From this evidence, it can be argued that if a marginalised and minority social group are identified for the purpose of cultural development, it is likely the very schemes and programmes implemented, and ultimately the results of the intervention will in turn be marginal and minor.

A study of minority ethnic film professionals' views undertaken by the BFI in 2000 showed there was considerable discontent with the film establishment of the UK. Respondents felt that the BFI was dominated by white middle-class men and women who were seen to have a limited understanding of minority groups and their cultural needs. They also believed there to be a lack of investment and staff involvement in both black and Asian affairs within the BFI. In response, the BFI took steps in the years that followed to set up film festivals on both African and black film in the form of the African Odysseys programmes and made concerted efforts to develop and cultivate its diversity strategy in education and exhibition minority ethnic groups.

## The Class/Race Nexus in British Film

The late 1990's saw a spate of films that depicted the decay of working-class masculinity and men undergoing crises with the loss of manufacturing industries like *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*. Regional working-class identity is viewed as relatively stable but in decline and this makes it easier to export the British image abroad. More crucially, ethnic characters are virtually non-existent; the few who are present remain on the periphery. The few attempts to incorporate ethnic characters in films depicting the working class suffered from a lack of fidelity. In *Secrets and Lies* (Mike Leigh, 1996) a young black professional woman decides to seek out her biological mother after the death of both her black foster parents, discovering that her mother is in fact white. While the film attempts to distort the traditional colour coding of black and white social standings (her mother is part of the white working class, while she represents the black middle class) what is absent in *Secrets and Lies* is awareness – Marianne Jean Baptiste's performance as a mixed race character is devoid of plausibility as her ethnic composition is in no way mixed race. In addition, as the narrative is not told from a black perspective despite the black character being central to the story, it could be suggested that the ethnic character has been created to supply visual interest to an otherwise white film.

Anti-racist politics have had a both mutually beneficial and antagonised relationship with state multiculturalism. While opportunities have been created via a cultural discourse for ethnic minorities, within this embrace between the multiculturalists and their experimental subjects, credible testimonies and dialogue of mainstream racism of the present day are muted. Multiculturalism manifests itself in cultural equality, as opposed to socio-political equality. The core of this argument is that culture, be it in the form of ethnic or national, remains a commodity that can both be made profitable and provide a cultural validation to those who implement it and those who subscribe to and consume it. However, political equality offers no such dividend. The notion of a political equality implicates the government in that existing *inequality* in its various forms has continued unabated despite its evident detrimental effects, and exposes the government as wilful allies of the status quo (Craig 2008: 122). Political transformation is changed to a cultural transformation. In this context, multiculturalism under New Labour can be understood as a replacement for a failed political project, manifested as an enthusiasm for difference.

The legacy of this New Labour discourse is that inequality has become understood almost exclusively through the prism of race and ethnicity, contested through multiculturalism. However, this disregards the existence of a multi-racial working class. Politically, the interests of this multi-ethnic working class is not seen as having a place in the classless multiculturalism, with the focus being on building an ethnic minority middle class by engineering diversity within the leading professions (Jones 2011: 78). Further, the term 'white working class' suggests that people of ethnicity cannot be considered as working class, occupying the position of the other.

This discourse can explain the absence from much of British social realism from the 90's onwards of the presence of ethnic minority characters. It could also be suggested that the reason why a overtly political filmmaker such as Ken Loach has never investigated issues of race and inequality from a black working class point of view is because he may feel unqualified to do so as a white director. Significantly, it is only in *Aye Fond Kiss* that Loach focuses his camera towards an ethnic minority community, and John Hill has repeatedly highlighted the absence of non-white characters in Loach's work (Hill 1999: 204).

However, in the context of social realism, if the director approaches the issue from a Marxist perspective this would enable him to transcend the *racial* dimension, as those Marxist perspectives on class form the higher universal category. In theory, the former contributes to the development of a false dichotomy in the way that historically the British government compartmentalise the working class by racial definitions in order to undermine the potential for the collectivisation of working class people's interests and experiences.

It is possible that there may be other reasons why a director does not feel they can work through the issues that would link the particular (race) to the more general (class) in a cinematic work of art - which is different to *theorising* the issue. It is possible that it is more prosaic, and Loach has never had the opportunity to direct a story/script that would accomplish this objective. His dependency on his scriptwriters, predominantly Jim Allen (white) and after Allen's death Paul Laverty (also white), could also suggest the issue is more correlated to how the scriptwriters feel about the class-race nexus.

Both explanations are equally plausible. While race and class are (or can be) related, there is axiomatically a world of difference between them. Even as a middle class Oxbridge educated white male, Loach has no problem in observing and analysing (often Northern) working class culture. Maybe one could speculate that even if he doesn't 'belong' in this milieu, it is something he is familiar with and is comfortable commenting upon it. However, when it comes to observing and analysing black culture, it is something with which Loach has had no real connection and does “not feel comfortable with” (Loach, 2011).

“I find ‘race’ such a miss-applied word; I’m not comfortable with that phrase. I’m interested in the collective experience, be it Irish or Spanish or black, or anything. But contemporary black culture is very distinctive, I’m old, I’ve no direct experience of the lives they live. I would not be comfortable with it.” (Loach, 2011)

From this, while Loach can recognise that a collectivised working class exists, there is still something of a fear that white directors making films about black culture would be seen as crass and lacking in understanding and/or authenticity no matter how good or bad the film might actually be. In addition, the vast majority of Ken Loaches films and films that fall under the social realism umbrella in general tend to be set in Northern towns and cities - 45% of non-whites live in London alone. So in one sense his films ethnic composition accurately reflects many parts of England presented in his films. However, what has been cultivated is an ideology that cannot stand firm under the weight of scrutiny considering that Britain’s history of migration is of immigrants assimilating into an existing class structure at working class level, if we consider that ethnic minorities make up 35% of the retail workforce, while 14% of public transport drivers are ethnic minorities (Alexander and James 2011:17). Domestic workers are nearly two thirds likely to be of black or ethnic minority origin, while unemployment amongst blacks remains above the European average. Exposure to poverty is still overwhelmingly organised by race. If you are born black and poor, your chances of remaining poor remain significantly higher than if you are born white and poor. This is because race – for all the piecemeal years of race equality legislation - still acts as the chief barrier to equal access to the

opportunities of British life. Ethnic minorities still lack the kind of filmic representation that reflects the reality of 21st century working class Britain.

The essential problem also exists in determining whether the genesis of British racism actually resides in the very nature of the class system, or in the racism and its *associated* practices which pervade British culture. British society is unequivocally unequal, with those on the periphery of society having many interwoven disadvantages. Economically, immigrant groups and ethnic minorities form part of this working class structure, often in occupations which predominantly position them at the very bottom of the hierarchical structure. They, therefore, share a socio-economic disadvantage with those historically considered to be of the white working class. Further, the demands from the capitalist economy for additional workers in the post war climate resulted in those from the Commonwealth being employed in traditional low paying working class jobs, forming a substitute band of labour that functioned to keep real wages low and disciplining those already in work by creating a potential reserve work force who, eager to assimilate into their new society, will occupy any role available (Abercrombie 2000: 253). From this perspective, the social class position of ethnic minorities is functionally conducive to the requirements of the capitalist socio-economic structure. Thus, contemporary ethnic disadvantage is essentially a function of the British class structure. Widespread racism remains within certain sections of the white working class groups, through the political process of pitching this demographic directly against ethnic minorities in the race for employment and housing. This alone, a product of the capitalist system, has prevented any common experience of class location.

## Problematic Approaches to Diversity

The cuts made by the Coalition government towards the arts sector in 2010 signaled the end of essentialised funding to black and ethnic minority arts. And with issues of race and identity returning to public consciousness, adequate consideration must now be given to whether a distinctively 'black' identity still exists. What needs to be dismantled is the naïve rhetoric that a single film or character can ventriloquise for an entire socio-ethnic community. When an artistic practice is ethicized, it is instantly marginalized, pushing it further away from the mainstream into which it is trying to assimilate. This is the conundrum; films and filmmakers want to be recognized as different but still want it to be accepted wholeheartedly into mainstream British cinema.

What must be recognised is that in terms of film and television, black is essentially a politically constructed category, and fixing a hegemonic version of what it means to be Black British is a long established ideological maneuver and like all ideology, such discourses attempt to organize people's behaviour and their perception of themselves. In this context, questions about black representation become problematic, as it implies a homogenous body with a single set of interests. But that black and ethnic minority cultural homogeneity has become fragmented by issues such as class, gender, sexuality and region. Present identities are heterogeneous, and black Britain is internally divided and less cohesive than the white middle or upper classes. Black culture is multiply constituted and can no longer be reduced to a singular formation around which a fixed identity can be constructed. Thus, a one - tone approach to behavioural conduct cannot form the standard to which an entire race can be amalgamated into a filmic representation. This is the existing problem; the need for a film culture that displays ethnic minorities as assimilated, prosperous and with social and economic agency, and a cinema that recognises existing systemic inequality and oppression amongst a black working class. This is where film and TV writers, directors and producers are often found wanting. Evidently, diversity quotas do not take into consideration not only the divided identity of black Britain, but also the *antagonistic* relationship that exists. The black middle class will reject negative depictions of blacks as the oppressed other not only because multiculturalism has popularised the idea of a

post racial British society, but also in order to distinguish themselves from the black working classes below.

Ethnic minorities formed a cohesive group in conflict with Thatcherism, and in particular and challenging both this authority and the white middle class film industry, through cinema, helped make them stronger and more cohesive, as they collectivised in opposition to the oppressive frameworks in Britain in the 80's. However, through multiculturalism and the race to assimilate into middle class society via New Labour rhetoric, that very black British identity has become much more individualised, less cohesive and more internally divided. They now lack the solidarity of the previous generation and therefore, possess insufficient power to collectively mount an adequate and effective challenge to the current hegemony.

Much of the films mentioned in this chapter refrain from outlining a coherent political imperative precisely because of the daunting task it represents within the narrative. There has been (and remains) an irregular representation of black, and other minority ethnic groups in UK films. A large proportion of this representation, however, can be interpreted as tokenistic gestures that were unlikely to have any serious cultural impact on the evolving racial and cultural realities of post-war Britain. What we have witnessed via state multiculturalism is the depoliticisation and culturalisation of social and political life. Equally, black films in Britain are more concerned with how closely they approximate socio-cultural (as opposed to socio-political) realities, where credible issues of racial inequality and discrimination created by systemic frameworks fail to insinuate themselves anywhere in the narrative. Explaining social exclusion in cultural terms provides a decidedly inaccurate illustration of a much more complex social landscape. Current cinematic and televisual discourses still do not provide an adequate and in-depth explanation of the inequalities produced in societies in which the racialised continue unabated to be the targets of institutionalised discrimination and scapegoating.

Admittedly, a key difference is presence. The 80s saw the growth of black British film, as independent workshops provided the environment for young Black filmmakers to develop their work, whilst the public institutions such as BFI, the Arts Council, Greater London Council and Channel 4 provided financial support for exhibition and distribution. In addition, the late 70s and 80s there was the first depictions of black Britons and this had a political dimension because of



perceptions of police oppression and social disorder. That remains the case now, albeit in a much more sophisticated form, yet there have been very few depictions of black people in a political way on screen. Race is not the political issue that it once was. Class has not replaced it, but religion has in the form of Islam; young Muslims have taken over this position of the 'other' in both radical and conservative discourse. Black characters have now been depoliticised in the name of post-Macpherson multiculturalism and whilst visible on screen, they are often reduced to peripheral characters or in professions where race is seldom mentioned.

It's true that by the late 90s black and Asian communities had become more established within British society. In broad terms, there was an emerging and confident third generation and a bigger ethnic minority general workforce in parts of the creative industries. There has been a great muddying of class and race identities taking place over the past 20 years or so. Socially, only the most extreme examples now stand out as being obvious. And maybe this is another problem; we can all identify the oppressors and the oppressed at the top and the bottom, but it is much harder to define, and represent those that exist in between. Without such obvious identity cards of both class and race, it becomes far more arduous to produce distinctive narratives that recur in film or politics.

Though no clear resolutions are visible, what is apparent is that it is the way these characters are selected and contextualised that determines whose interest is being served. It's not solely an absence of ethnic minority characters from British film; the characters emerge, but in a range of modes that deny their full inclusion. To subscribe to current trends would be to accept that black characters can only occupy roles as the oppressed 'other' or the subject of white anxiety. What must be avoided is a series of unconvincing ethnic characters inserted into a narrative to fulfill diversity quotas. The specificity of race is unnecessary if it invokes tokenism by film and TV producers afraid of appearing racist in a liberal, artistic environment.

It is suggested that the rift between black filmmakers and the British film establishment also stems from the fact that the decision makers are almost entirely white; problems can arise when commissioners see little economic or cultural benefit in financially supporting and commissioning the development of black filmmakers and a black film culture (Berkley 2011). They do not fully understand the essential cultural framework of black and Asian scripts,

and are thus not in a suitable position to effectively assess a film's potential commercial and critical impact. Therefore, despite the changes made in the British film industry, it is suggested here that the vast majority of these changes have been maladroit. The film industry still does not represent the racial composition of the UK and takes a narrow view of where talent may be found. Existing recruitment practices are at the core of this issue, making it arduous for specific groups to consolidate a position in the industry. This has, and will continue to restrict the kinds of films that are produced in the UK and expanded the verticality between the British film industry and diverse audiences (Bhavnani 2007: 181).

Unequivocally, Channel 4 has been a pivotal force in British cinema since the early 80s, making possible a significant number of black and Asian films in Britain, gradually been re-defined by cultural and ethnic hybridity. However, Channel 4's multicultural department, initially aggrandised as fundamental to challenging Britain's white middle class dominated industry, failed in its objective to develop a lasting black film production culture, and ultimately served as piecemeal tokenism, enabling the mainstream of the channel to continue its programming untouched by the increased demands for a balanced representation of ethnic minorities in the film and television industry, and by the changing face of British society.

Further, the impact of the workshops is also a subject of ongoing controversy. For some, the workshops simply institutionalised black creativity and encouraged their co-opting into an impotent race relations film discourse devoid of any lasting cultural impact, for both black Britons and the wider British society. In the mid 90s it became apparent that Channel 4 had to pursue ratings, although it still had its experimental wing in the Independent Film and Video unit led by Alan Fountain. This move towards a much more commercial strand of filmmaking is also evident in their films depicting Black communities, such as *Babymother* (Julian Henriques, 1998).

The closure of the Multicultural Department in 2002 by Michael Jackson represented the acceptance of New Labour's post-multiculturalism discourse within public service broadcasting. In 2000, a network of UK broadcasters including Channel 4 established the Cultural Diversity Network (CDN) specifically designed to promote cultural diversity both in front and behind the camera, although its impact in substantially addressing the issue remains ambiguous. Channel 4

now rearticulated multiculturalism as part of a broader agenda in which ethnic diversity was just one element in the equation (Malik; 2007:6).

Diversity in TV and the media. It's a big subject - and a top priority for us at Channel 4. After all, our job is to appeal to everyone, whatever their culture, nationality, religious persuasion, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, race or age.

Channel 4 prides itself on the wide range of people it employs. Not only does this reflect its audience more accurately, it also promotes the variety of creative thinking and programming that have made Channel 4 what it is today. It's only by attracting people from the widest possible backgrounds with the most diverse range of attitudes, opinions and beliefs that we can keep producing the kind of challenging, engaging output you've come to expect from us. In essence, we want to respect people for who not what they are. People should be judged on how they do their job and what they bring to the table, which is why we strive to create an atmosphere where everyone feels free to contribute without fear. This way, we can get the very best for everyone, whichever side of the screen you sit.

So we're constantly looking for ways to help more people from diverse backgrounds break into the industry. We're not just talking on-screen either, but all the other areas it takes to keep a media business going: production, creative, planning, press relations, commissioning, HR, finance, commercial, new media and so on. Our aim is to nurture new talent and original ideas; champion alternative voices and fresh perspectives; challenge people to see the world differently and inspire real change (Channel 4: 2013).

The drive for an authentic, self actualising ethnic minority film practice was dominant at Channel 4 during a time when film culture and commerce had a much more benevolent relationship. However, under neoliberalism, this had to adhere to an economic logic, and it could not compete. Economic value was assigned to something not previously considered in economic terms. Profit became the ultimate horizon of significance, not the cultivation of a film culture by and for unrepresented groups. As an industry they felt the pressure of a new constellation of

economic and commercial forces through the subjective interests of New Labour and its neoliberal agenda.

So why is there a continued association in academia with Channel 4 with its original remit, and appeals to the Channel to once again provide spaces for the alternative voices in British film? It's because Channel 4 was the first to articulate a commitment to ethnic minority filmmaking as an ideological view. We could trace multicultural discourses beyond Channel 4, at the BBC and ITV, but these did not have the same cultural impact. These are achievements from the past that must be celebrated, but that is the past; there are too many limitations to what's current. There has been an institutional transformation of Channel 4, and many may argue that Channel 4's original remit is a relic of the 80's. But it's not nostalgic to have films that are made by and for disempowered communities that still these days have no meaningful representation. Naturally the style and approach and method will change over time, but the ambition should remain urgent and vital. What is present is a film and a broadcasting culture that is de-coupled from public mass opinion. The mainstream media seem to be remote from what people are actually saying and feeling. As an industry, they admit that they have found it arduous to reach out to ethnic minority and working class audiences, but are unable to produce a credible method of redressing this.

The UKFC was also guilty of failing to make a lasting impact on Black British cinema. What has been lamented by many is that there was no essentialised, specific fund for black and ethnic minority filmmakers to develop feature length films. At the time, the UKFC insisted that black filmmakers did not require a separate, ethnicised fund, as confidence existed amongst their board members that black film development could be included within the mainstream funding schemes. But those very gatekeepers made it harder for blacks to penetrate the mainstream to which they intended to open the doors.

A key difference from the GLC fund or the early Channel 4 period was that the UKFC demanded commercial returns on investment. Resources were managed by fund managers and not by cultural committees, and via a system of commissioning editors. In effect, these were public servants applying a studio system structure. The National Lottery money was not used in an innovative or risk taking way. From a black perspective, this was a major failure. This is not to suggest that cultural value of film was reduced to a simple question of commercial viability and financial recoupment. It is to say that the UKFC was sensitive to the political pressures from the

New Labour, in the sense that there existed a need to justify government spending on culture other than in its instrumental use to health, education and defense.

In addition, the diversity agenda became *process* led, as opposed to creativity led, focussed on damage limitation or reducing exposure to equal opportunities legislation. The appointment of Marcia Williams, a barrister with a track record in implementing equal opportunities policy in the corporate sector, is evidence that diversity became a minimalist issue to hide behind, as opposed to encourage risk taking. It is argued here that trying to measure the cultural value of diversity in UK film became a bureaucratic process disconnected to the real activity of actually making films, whether or not the films are ostensibly commercial.

Further, diversity became a whole genre in itself, moving away from equal opportunities specifically for ethnic minorities. Marcia Williams has explained that the UKFC's use of the term 'diversity' included 'equality of opportunity', a central tenant of New Labour's Third Way ideology. This broader definition was required as existing terms such as 'cultural diversity' were too intimately related with ethnicity. According to Williams, the UKFC wanted 'diversity' to express everything that co-opted all marginalised minorities, including sexual orientation, regional isolation and age.

Diversity as a term had no pedigree prior to New Labour in our broadcasting and cultural institutions. Diversity became a way of talking about race but is actually disconnected to the main issue. It was a demonstration of cultural institutions playing games with terminology. Diversity became a meaningless term unconnected to equality, equality in access and representation and production. It's no longer about the provision of and accessing the means of filmic production to minority groups, which is what was fought for by the unions, and the GLC and Channel 4 through the workshop movement - equality in access and representation and production. Tragically, post 1997 both ethnic minorities and the left were unable to provide alternative responses to this cultural discourse, and that gave New Labour's diversity, with all its failings, a free pass it should never have enjoyed.

## Summary

Many subscribe to the notion that Britain is now a post racial society where race and ethnicity are no longer a barrier to success, and individual character, application and endeavour are the determinants to life chances. However, Britain is a society where black and ethnic minorities continue to occupy the poorest areas of Britain in the most substandard council housing.

Discrimination against people from ethnic groups is systematically evidenced at every stage of the criminal justice system; in some areas black people are nearly 8 times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than white people (Abercrombie 2000:536). In addition, blacks are more likely to receive longer custodial sentences than their white counterparts. We continue to have what can only be described as an inefficient educational system in which nearly 60% of black boys continually fail to reach the benchmarked 5 a-c grades at GCSE level and a high proportion are excluded. We have an employment market that continues to make it difficult for ethnic minorities to secure places in key decision making roles across a number of both public and private sectors, and continuing far right mobilisation in the form of the British National Party and the English Defence League, now is a period charged with difficulties of living as marginalized minorities in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Racism persists because there has been no serious political effort to challenge the interconnections between the concept of race and the structures and institutions of the British state. There are people with stories to be told, and as a society we need that kind of film culture. But who will in valuate those projects? Where are this generation's Mamoun Hassans, the Farrukh Dohndys, the Parminder Virs, the Yasmin Anwars, the Julian Henriques and the Isaac Juliens? And who will facilitate their ideas?

New Labour's political and cultural veiling of racism through a mobilisation and privileging of the language of multiculturalism must be interrogated cinematically as this semantic movement has cultivated an inability and reluctance to openly engage with race, its genesis in European political thought and the consequences for individual and collectives lives in Britain. Current cinematic and televisual discourses still do not provide an adequate and in depth explanation of the inequalities produced in societies in which the racialised continue to be the targets of unabated institutionalised discrimination and scapegoating (Alexander & James 2011: 18).

There are further shifts occurring. In Channel 4's *Top Boy* (Yann Demange, 2011) and the BBC's *One Night* (David Evans, 2012) television is now becoming the dominant outlet for black representation on screen. However, while heavily indebted to American TV shows like *The Wire* for its narrative framework, these recent British television dramas, which are still holistically in the hands of non-black writers and directors, show no sign of interest in genuine and concerted racial questions (Gaffney, F: 2011). What this represents is an anthropological expedition into the darkest corners and lowest parts of the class/race nexus in Britain. Though this continues to leave these writers and directors open to accusations of being patronising (and perhaps to some extent they are), they are nonetheless making dramas that show an attempt to represent ethnic minorities on TV in a manner other than dismissive or comic. However, they are able to do this because ethnic minorities effectively have no potent voice of their own within our cultural institutions. Frustration can and should be levelled at gatekeepers, be it black or white as they perpetuate this level of lack of awareness, lack of consciousness or political action, but the black writers and directors themselves must exercise a degree of independence, and reflect back to society what society is and not be compliant.

A political cinema is the only way that black film practitioners can operate within the industry and against the government's practices. However, it will not be possible for ethnic minority film practitioners to cultivate a new filmic movement to parallel that of the 1970's and 1980's, one that is capable of being firm, creative and determined enough to engage directly and effectively in the *politics* of ethnic minority existence, whilst the themes and issues that compose current films continue to be culturalised, separating them analytically from the very political economy that provides their conditions of existence.

Attitudes and approaches need to change considerably before black film can be regarded as an integral aspect of British culture. The film and TV institutions are completely versed in notions of an all encompassing black identity, and this narrow-mindedness about representation, plus the fact that the very policy makers and Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) organisations put in place to inform ethnic minority cultural strategies are perpetually failing to find common ground on how to effectively address race equality and diversity, continues to overcome artistic ambition. Filmmakers must again be introduced to the idea that social realism has the potential to offer the internal threat to the phantom ideal of national identity and culture, symbolised by effectively

bringing social unrest, unemployment and racial discrimination and tension to screen in a socio-political form, with an unequivocal conviction as to who is culpable.

But, before we can conceptualise what a polemic black British film culture could be, we must first view where black film culture of any discourse lies, particularly within the film programmes in our cultural institutions. As previously stated, our film institutions are generally reactive to the political mandates and frameworks given to them. In a debate in the House of Commons in March 2011, Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark raised the issue of ethnic diversity in British cinema with the Conservative Minister for Culture, stating that:

As we celebrate the Baftas and the Oscars, I am sure that the Minister will have noticed that there are very few black and minority ethnic faces in front of the screen, and the work force behind the screen are similarly unrepresentative. Will he use his influence to ensure that when the British Film Institute, which is based on the south bank in my part of the world, takes over responsibilities, it understands the importance of diversity for the whole of the work force, and will he work with me to ensure that that is achieved?  
(Simon Hughes, March 2011)

Edward Vaisey, Conservative Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, responded with:

I absolutely agree with the Right Hon. Gentleman. I am certainly happy to work with him and the British Film Institute to ensure that that happens and that we make significant progress (Edward Vaisey, March 2011).

What followed was *The Film Policy Review*, commissioned by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and produced by an eight-strong independent panel chaired by Lord Chris Smith. The review made several recommendations constructed to ensure that the film industry plays a key role in driving economic growth and maximising audience access to films.



The principal objectives for the Review were:

1. To identify market failures preventing the creation of a more successful and fully integrated British film industry and, where possible, to use policy to help address these obstacles and assist in building a model which is adaptable enough to work effectively in a rapidly changing global marketplace.
2. To determine how best to set Policy directions for Lottery funding, and to deploy Lottery and Grant-in Aid funding generally to support the growth of a more successful UK film sector to the benefit of the public and the industry.
3. To identify ways to develop and retain UK talent to support this model; by building on our inherently British creativity and on existing skills strategies to maximise development of new and diverse talent across entrepreneurial, technical and creative disciplines.
4. To help determine how best to increase audience demand for film, including independent British film, the BFI will lead work which will aim to maximise the impact of film education, in particular by looking at ways to consolidate existing initiatives. This work will also aim to increase access UK-wide to our rich screen heritage, as well as inspiring new generations from all backgrounds to learn about, and participate in, film and film culture. However, in ‘*The Diversity Challenge*’ section in the *UK Film Policy Review* published in early 2012, a mere five lines from a 111-page report are dedicated to the issue of diversity:

Due in part to the informality of its employment practices, the UK film industry has a tendency to over-representation of white males and under-representation of women and people from diverse groups. For example, in a city (London) where 24% of the workforce are from minority ethnic groups, the film production workforce is only 7% BAME. This disadvantage has persisted despite a decade of attempts to encourage greater diversity in employment (DCMS, 2012)

Thus, the statement made in the House of Commons hasn't assumed any tangible shape. From this, developing a black film culture may continue to be an uphill task because the cultural institutions and the politicians that inform them place a completely different value system on ethnic minority film and arts. It's not an intrinsic part of their cultural agenda.

In October 2012, the BFI launched *Film Forever - Supporting UK Film 2012-2017*. This publication, informed by the *Film Policy Review*, demonstrated where and how their £98.1 million income over this period will be spent. Diversity has been included into a BFI Research and Diversity Section, with a combined annual budget of £1.2 million. The publication stated that:

The Diversity funds will help promote equal access, participation and strengthening cultural diversity. It will also enhance access for people with sensory impairments and fund pilots for disabled people.  
(BFI Film Forever, 2013)

From this £1.2 million, just £200,000 p.a has been dedicated to diversity, which as I have stated has become a hotch potch of discourses including disability, gender, sexuality and race. Diversity now seems to be an optional accessory to the main aims of the film industry and it's clear that the development of a black/ethnic minority film culture cannot be reconciled under overt commercialism. It is testimony to the utter vacuousness of our diversity discourse in film. Any serious examination of inequality in the film industry, from the Annan Report onwards must conclude that it an ideological gambit designed to obscure the immense racio- social divisions and inequalities within the film industry. Embracing this diversity discourse effectively means we no longer have anything genuine to articulate about these inequalities, their structural causes or how to address them.

The BFI provided further clarity on their diversity by announcing both a Diversity Fund and Diversity strategy to be implemented in 2013:

The BFI want to take more of a leadership role in regard to diversity, not just within the BFI but in the film sector more broadly. We are committed to a £200,000 a year Diversity Fund. £200,000 a year is not a great amount in the grand scheme of things, so the fundamental thing that we are trying to work out is how we make sure that every bit of activity going on at the BFI has a mind-set towards making sure that what we do is inclusive and, that will be different in each area and we are trying to work out what we mean by diversity and equality, what are the principles that as an organisation we should be putting in place, and what are the mechanics that should feed down, in term of monitoring so that we can live up to what are golden ambitions are.

We are working to get a clear framework with each (BFI) team do find what are the gaps in this area, what does the evidence tell us what we are missing and what can we do to make a meaningful difference in those areas. This will cut across the educational activity, advocacy and leadership, working with the wider film sector, the workforce, and working with all the people who make film to make sure that there are guidelines, that we are giving money to a reflective range of projects and people, not just the most obvious or usual suspects (BFI Diversity Strategy, 2013).

In terms of the strategy's execution, the problem may lie with its framework. This approach may prove problematic to some extent as there remains a distinctive ethical issue in influencing a creative practice or film policy on the premise of someone's race or colour and creating a quota, which as we have read, has proved abortive with previous attempts.

So if there is a situation where there are not enough black and ethnic minority people in the film industry, or being funded by the film industry and may contribute to developing a distinctive black and ethnic minority film culture in a society or industry where there could but is not a full representation of a multi ethnic society, how do you artificially or unilaterally create a situation where you have to give jobs to ethnic minorities by the very nature of a protocol? Does this

actually address the problem? The paramount concern with this issue is ultimately agendas are being served that are not indexed to the wellbeing of the targeted groups or the industry. The BFI outlined their ideological framework for their definition of diversity by stating:

We start with the premise that our mission is that everyone can have a cultural connection with film, and our activities should be reflective of the UK population as a whole. We've started with the Equalities Act definition, so age, gender, ethnicity ect, there are some other characteristics more relevant to film such as socio-economic background, nationality and regionality on account of the criticisms of the film industry being very London centric, so making sure our activities cover the regions. But one of the critical things is that we take action based on evidence, where there are particular areas of underrepresentation, and making sure that the huge 5-19 programme we are delivering has genuine reach. Making sure all our big programmes don't have any barriers to any people, but the key is finding areas of underrepresentation, and seeing what we can do to address those. We are hoping to announce the full fund and the strategy together in the summer (BFI Diversity Strategy, 2013).

In 2013, the CDN changed their name from Cultural Diversity Network to Creative Diversity Network, and the shift from multiculturalism to cultural diversity to creative diversity, which does not name specific communities, must be used as a point of evidence as the film industry is adopting this term as a concept. While there may be a belief that this term makes both an ethical argument as well as a economic one as creativity, wherever it originates from drives innovation, the shift from cultural to creative diversity has given the opportunity for institutions to escape their responsibility in regard to developing a clear principle as to who they are targeting and what the intended impact will be.

If we are to analyse this issue from a top down perspective, the accusation that must underpin all diversity schemes is that there are certain areas in the creative industries that remain discriminative and prejudicing opportunities. It is highly ambiguous to suggest that this is not a premise that is in operation in the confines of managing a cultural institution in Britain, as the facts are there are not enough leaders in our cultural institutions, from the BBC to Channel 4,

from Creative England to the BFI, and what is required is to get to the root of why and that is what contemporary ideas of *creative diversity* do not do.

We can now look at the *African Odysseys* film programme at the BFI to contextualise this argument. There can be acknowledgement of what *African Odysseys* is trying to achieve, but the fact remains that the BFI as an institution appeals overwhelmingly to a certain section of British society, i.e. the cultural elite. There is a real desire for the *African Odysseys* programmes to attract more than the black opinion formers, the film intelligentsia, and middle class liberals, but its current form may prevent the films from achieving any kind of significant cultural impact outside a rarefied, educated and self-congratulatory circle already converted. But this is an age-old problem with British arts and culture, and any change in this is related with raising levels of consciousness and *then* interest. It can be argued that the current 16-35 age groups interests do not appear to be channeled towards concrete socio-political engagement and the *African Odysseys* programmes tend towards polemical film content. So the challenge for the BFI is how to break through prevailing ignorance and disinterest at *all* levels, but it begins specifically with the general curriculum, broadcasters and arts institutions. Minority-ethnic communities need to be encouraged and given the funding to engage in filmmaking, but parallel to this, audiences needs to broaden their cultural palate.

Part of the problem is also that film programmers must negotiate with the default philistinism from risk adverse bureaucrats in our cultural institutions. To subscribe to notions that our cultural institutions possess a genuine desire for filmic diversity is disconnected from the de facto practices within institutions. It's by coercion that diversity continues to be implemented in our institution's cultural programmes, which indicates exactly why it has remained piecemeal.

If black British filmmaking, currently congruent with notions of post racialism, is to successfully refute legitimate charges of being maladroit, ineffective and apolitical it must venture into the world of concrete socio-political engagement. If black filmmaking needs to be re-politicized, then social realism is the cinematic device, the genre, or even the approach, with which to achieve it. It must provide a politics capable of coherently presenting racial discrimination, ideas and stimulating activity, inclusive dialogue and mobilisation. However, the difficulty is that, with a very few exceptions, British black writers/directors/film makers have been (and continue to be)

relatively thin on the ground, having being denied the chance to establish long-lasting careers, and even a ground breaking director such as Horace Ove is still obscure within the various histories of British cinema. Who then is (or can be) the authentic filmic voices, or custodians, of a British black political film culture?

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to draw together the numerous important filmic, sociological and political ideas and themes that were explored in this thesis for the purpose of offering overall conclusions. The principle objectives of this investigation were to propose a new means of orientation to the problems associated with the on-screen representation and social exclusion in the British film industry and to underscore the usefulness of adopting new filmic solutions to present contemporary social issues. Specifically, this was an investigation into the depoliticisation and decontextualisation of social realism, within the context of both race and class, and the socio-cultural discourses that produced the changes within the filmic approach. The practical dimension of this thesis was to produce an original feature length screenplay that identified the socio-political enquiries absent in contemporary social realism, extracting the necessary sociological approaches argued in the theoretical chapters that emphasise the relationship between protagonist and state institutions, and executing within the screenplay the appropriate narrative devices for this. While this study was a socio-cultural and textual analysis, it is unavoidable that its findings have ideological and political implications.

This body of research has informed the practised based part of this Ph.D., identifying the narratives and the cultural economy in which the practical work is facilitated and invaluated. With specific regard to the practice of screenwriting, in placing the government institutions at the centre of the narrative conflict against the protagonist, this narrative technique will enunciate the political and more crucially, replicate the social reality the practitioner is attempting to depict.

The *characterisation* of the protagonist has a correlation with the overall Ph.D. thesis, in that social realism as it stands has other prerogatives in mind than encouraging a rethinking of government policy. The screenplay for this Ph.D., *An Unsuitable Woman*, is an attempt to return to a method of story telling which puts the antagonistic relationship between citizen and state at the centre of the story. The issue in question is fostering and the bureaucratic legislation, which prevents potential mothers - like our protagonist - from doing so. However, in order to make this argument come alive beyond the script, and highlight the injustice implicit in this particular government policy, the objective as a screenwriter was to show a woman who would make an

excellent mother being denied the chance because of a past crime. Thus, the theoretical and the practical are in tandem, informing each other.

This thesis has taken on a wide and varied body of research from traditional film studies, sociology and politics. For the most part, these accounts of British social realism, some of which are very informative and interesting indeed, are nevertheless unable to offer new perspectives on some of the central problems and issues faced in British film today. All but Hallam (2010) were written without reference to thorough perspectives within the class/race nexus. None were underpinned by the desire to answer critical socio-political questions. The objective of this thesis was to offer a more adequate and reality-congruent picture of British film, past and present. The focus was on gaining an understanding of social exclusion within a film culture and on screen representations that emerge as a direct result, analysing the history of black film and its relationship with broadcasters and institutions in order to find the roots of its exclusivity, exploring the industry's development in the light of wider political processes.

In the first chapter of this thesis, a critique was offered of the New Labour cultural policy in specific regard to film policy, in relation to the *Third Way*. Evidence was presented to suggest that much of British film policy, and the UKFC policy specifically, was underpinned by objectives that reflected a commercial approach. In particular, UKFC policy tended to view the concepts of film as social practice in a reductive fashion, and gave insufficient attention and consideration to the socio-cultural returns on investment. This severely impacted the space for the development and commissioning of social realist films.

As described in Chapter 1, the figuration of British film expanded markedly from around the beginning of the 21 century, mostly as a result of the global expansion of British film and the processes of commercialisation that were set in motion from the decrees, increased public funding and tax breaks from New Labour. BBC Films and FilmFour, two of the leading film production companies in Britain intimately entwined with the government, were constrained in relation to having to tally with these wider political developments.

The growing ties of interdependence in the British film figuration had the consequence of limiting the extent to which Channel 4 could potentially continue the development of social realism in the manner in which they began. This was because of the various methods that New



Labour's Ministers for Culture (first Chris Smith and later Tessa Jowell) came to develop a measure of political control over Channel 4, which had the effect of lessening its creative autonomy. Specifically, in 2002 new Chief Executive Mark Thompson called for the New Labour government to provide £60 million in financial assistance for the channel to allow it to compete commercially, his argument being that as "Channel Four often acted under its public service broadcasting remit rather than in commercial terms, the government ought to consider guaranteeing with funding"(Edwardes, 2002:1). Jowell denied this request, arguing that "it is not in our policy" to allocate public money to boost the channel. Further, she stated that she would not "punish the BBC" as this sum would have to be redirected from their license fee (Edwardes, 2002:1).

However, in 2007 Jowell agreed to subsidise Channel 4's digital switchover costs of £14 million directly from the BBC license fee, on the proviso that the channel adheres to its public service remit, stating that "Channel 4 has always been at its strongest when it has closely adhered to its public purpose: innovative, educational, distinctive and appealing to diverse audiences. These are the reasons it was created in the first place. Channel 4 has had an important role as a key source of public service competition, as well as a catalyst for the development of a world-beating independent sector and an important contributor to the wider creative economy" (Deans, 2007:1). She further justified spending public revenue on Channel Four (having previously refused the request) by predicting that without government investment the channel would not be in a position to carry out its public services remit, predicting that "Despite the profound changes ahead for the sector in the coming years, I remain convinced that the case for public service broadcasting will endure. However Channel 4's ability to deliver public service broadcasting in the future is likely to come under sustained pressure in just a few years" (Deans, 2007:1)

Despite Jowell's theory, it was argued in Chapter 1 that not only did New Labour fail to enforce this quid pro quo term with any conviction, but they actually encouraged and ushered in the commercialisation of the channel, no greater manifest than in the creation (and subsequent collapse) of FilmFour. As the figuration of British film became more complex due to the sectors globalization and commercialisation, there were a number of unintended consequences that the channel were ultimately forced to contend with as they sought to retain control of its autonomous

mode of production. The antipathy to public service, by both New Labour and the channel was undoubtedly the most problematic of all consequences of New Labour's involvement with Channel 4.

In the second chapter of this thesis, a critique was provided of the current stock of historical knowledge of film from a black and ethnic minority perspective. While leading individuals within film recognised the need for long-term planning and understood the inevitable slow progress of change, when it came to critical decision-making, they were restricted by the growing pressures of New Labour political discourse; they were constrained through ties of political interdependence. Creating the space for a body of films that told the experience of a marginalized BAME community would not capture the zeitgeist. Many, if not most, of the film industry's recent schemes have been designed and introduced for the purposes of promoting cinema to new and diverse sections of the British public, not of developing already-existing BAME talent up to the elite level. These schemes have been criticised in this chapter for being based on and supported by inadequate knowledge and understanding of the specific groups that were targeted as well as the particular problems they sought to overcome. This analysis has revealed that the roots of and solutions to many of the film industry problems lay in an analysis of the qualitative changes in the black British experience.

As argued in both Chapter 1 and 2, the BBC, Channel Four and the UKFC believed in a consensus of opinion from New Labour in regard to both class and race. While race politics could be tempered by surface level inclusion by BAME groups in the film industry, this was implemented not as much through conviction as expediency. Film policy therefore, became a form of realpolitik. I showed in Chapter 2 how as a consequence, policy makers in British film showed an inadequate appreciation and understanding of the needs of BAME groups, specifically because of an absence of representation from these groups in the actual decision-making process. Cultural proximity then, should have been a requisite for the policy maker to be able to gain awareness of their inability both to identify the targeted groups and implement effective policy. It was suggested in Chapter 2 that the UKFC were unable to bridge the gulf of detachment that would have enabled them to recognise their inadequate level of understanding, and to be aware of their relative inability to steer the course of cultural diversity in British film.

Many, if not most, of the initiatives launched by the UKFC and the BBC failed to reach and remedy the genesis of the problem, and actually led to a whole host of consequences for British social realism, these were shown across Chapter 2. Despite this, the UKFC continued to believe, with their current level of understanding, that they could implement successful measures to create diversity in British film. This inadequacy was based on their poor conceptualisation of the very groups and individuals they sought to change; that is, filmmakers, producers and BAME committees.

In the early 2000's the film industry began to make considerable profits from a mixed economy of new government and public investments, which should have had the consequence of affording the UKFC an increasing amount of revenue to invest back into British film development at all levels. Growing UKFC profits and an increasingly proactive transatlantic-thinking perspective thus afforded the UKFC opportunities to put more focus on large, high production value films. Since the late 90's, as the film industry's profits increased considerably, the UKFC's focus also shifted more towards the development of a much more transatlantic film culture, aided by the tax breaks afforded by Gordon Brown's Treasury. Community, regional and voluntary-run film organisations and production companies, on the other hand, were not bestowed to the same extent by these commercial processes.

In relation to black British cinema, diversity has now become a term that cannot be subscribed to with any kind of precision. Further, it is clear that the relationship between those who endorse the contemporary understanding of diversity, the BBC, Channel Four, the BFI, Creative England and the DMCS is complex and underpinned by ties of functional interdependence. While these institutions consistently present different objectives, they have developed to become functionally reliant on each other. Of course, this relationship has come to bring problems to the idea of diversity in terms of the way it manifests itself. There are many different ways to produce genuine diversity in British film, what matters is creating the necessary *political* will and specific language to pursue any of them. Race and class still matter, regardless of whether it's neutralised by employing language such as creative diversity or social exclusion.

The real question however, is not who is approaching social realism right or wrong but rather why it matters. The answer is that political participation is necessary for a both a film industry,

and more crucially, a film culture to function most effectively. There are at least two reasons for this. First, the more closely a national cinema represents the composition of society as a whole, the more balanced its policies are likely to be. This means that it is not just important to include the working class and ethnic minorities, but also to ensure broad representation. Second, a cross class and ethnic film industry should, all other things being equal, tend to address more of the concerns that apply exclusively or disproportionately to them. Of course, working class, black and Asian filmmakers don't always bring up issues that are important to black and Asian, and the working class, and white and middle class practitioners don't always exclude these concerns. But working class, black and ethnic minority filmic practitioners are more likely create a cinema that affects their own demographics' concerns.

However, it may prove to be an impossible challenge to try to reconcile a remit to provide public service broadcasting of a certain political position with a commitment to commercialism by advocating a varying synthesis neoliberalism. It's not fully compatible. On the specific issue of diversity in British cinema its undeniable that if you withdraw funding from minority groups, the culture your are trying to cultivate is going to be damaged. Generally, the successful implementation of any scheme designed to change what is rooted as part of a particular film culture requires a sound base of knowledge of the subject matter, its development over history and an understanding of the objectives and motivations of the various practitioners and institutions and stakeholders that are implicated within the complicated process of implementation. The process of rethinking policy, however, is constrained by two important factors, firstly, the need for short, medium and long-term solutions; and, secondly, the need to acknowledge and build upon existing policy.

"We are all products of our environment". This tagline from Ben Drew aka Plan B's debut film *Ill Manors* gives the impression that we are about to embark on a realistic, polemical account of life on the periphery of Britain's underclass. However, by not interrogating the antagonistic oppressive political system that usher in these ills, what the film proved to be was a missed opportunity at a time when it could have maximum effect. *Ill Manors* ultimately represented a crisis of working class morality, as opposed to ineffective political agendas - drama in a social vacuum.

Naturally, it is not fair to hold filmmakers responsible for every incorrect application and demonstration of working class and ethnic minority existence in film. But this approach comes at a cost. The exaggerated behavioural aspects of this demographic, argued by the Tories as the genesis of social problems, will distort the political agenda. Secondly, by staying above the fray of socio-political and ideological conflict, the films seem to command the guilty applause and unequivocal acceptance of liberals, who seem to be using the films such as *Fish Tank*, *Bullet Boy* and more recently *Ill Manors* as the article of faith when contextualising social problems. Of course, social realism has hinted at a comprehensive ideology. Ken Loach's films drew its power from its association with the political left. However, the sheer scale of government investment in the film sector afforded New Labour a greater influence on how British film was to be organised. As argued in Chapter 1 via a textual analysis of key filmic texts, the disappearance of politicised working class voices in British cinema were distinctive qualities of a class based industry, paradoxically operating within the Third Way philosophy of a classless society. The developing social character of British film at the start of the 21st century therefore, came to be influenced by aspects of both New Labour's commercial interests in the film sector and its middle-class ideologies.

Film is more than just a visual experience. It can be a site of a realistic portrayal of society, that can affect political imagination, shaping, and to some extent limiting the kind of social change that can be achieved. This is why we all find comprehensive, detailed, filmic political engagement so compelling. But in order to achieve this, we need to look to the details of political institutions and public policy. The important opposition is between government and society, not the individual and his or her moral or cultural code.

Georg Lukacs - in a famous essay called *Narrate or Describe*, made the distinction between naturalism and realism. The former is obsessed with details but has no grasp of the social dynamics of the life it is portraying. The latter, explores the social relationships within a narrative structure that allows the momentum of the contradictions within the fictional world to build into revealing action. From this theory, British social realism has clearly abandoned its narrative, 'realist' past for its descriptive, 'naturalism' present (Lukacs, 1970: 111).

The narrative message that personal behaviour determines life chances is indicative of the pervasive discourse of meritocracy. The problem with such arguments is that they exaggerate the cultural differences between the poor and other social groups and place too great an emphasis on cultural practices as an explanation of their disadvantage, reducing reality to a conflict between working class characters and their behavioural decisions. The landscape of social inequality in Britain is much more complex than this.

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*L-Shaped Room, The* (1962, Bryan Forbes, UK)

*Ladybird, ladybird*, (1992, Ken Loach, UK)

*Last Resort* (2000, Pawel Pawlikowski, UK)

*Letter to Brezhnev* (1985, Chris Bernard, UK)

*Like Father* (2000, Amber Street Collective, UK)

*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998, Guy Ritchie UK)

*London to Brighton* (2007, Paul Andrew Williams, UK)

*Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, The* (1962, Tony Richardson UK)

*Long Day Dying, The* (1968, Peter Collingson, UK)

*Look Back in Anger* (1958, Tony Richardson UK)

*Looks and Smiles* (1981, Ken Loach, UK)

*Love, Honour and Obey* (2000, Dominic Anciano, UK)

*Love Story* (1999, Nick Love, UK)

*Meantime* (1983, Mike Leigh)

*Mischief Night* (2006, Penny Woolcock, UK)

*My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985, Stephen Frears UK)

*My Name Is Joe* (1998, Ken Loach, UK)

*My Son the Fanatic* (1997, Udayan Prasad, UK)

*Nil By Mouth* (1997, Gary Oldman UK)

*Notting Hill* (1999, Roger Mitchell, UK)  
*Orphans* (1997, Peter Mullan, UK)  
*Outlaw* (2000, Nick Lowe UK)  
*Place to Go, A* (1963, Michael Relph, UK)  
*Poor Cow* (1967, Ken Loach UK)  
*Pool of London* (1951, Basil Dearden, UK)  
*Price Of Coal* (1977, Ken Loach UK)  
*Principles of Lust* (2003, Penny Woolcock, UK)  
*Queen, The* (2006, Stephen Frears, UK)  
*Raining Stones* (1993, Ken Loach, UK)  
*Reckoning, The* (1969, Jack Gold, UK)  
*Red Road* (2006, Andrea Arnold, UK)  
*Road* (1987, Alan Clark, UK)  
*Rolling with the Nines* (2006, Julian Gibey, UK)  
*Room at the Top* (1959, Jack Clayton, UK)  
*Room for Romeo Bras, A* (1999, Shane Meadows, UK)  
*Ruby Blue* (2007, Jan Dunn ,UK)  
*Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987, Stephen Frears, UK)  
*Sapphire* (1959, Basil Dearden, UK)  
*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960, Karel Reisz, UK)  
*Secrets and Lies* (1996, Mike Leigh, UK)  
*Scum* (1987, Alan Clark, UK)  
*Shifty* (2009, Eran Creevy,UK)  
*Sliding Doors* (1998, Peter Howitt, UK)  
*Somers Town* (2009, Shane Meadows, UK)



*Sweet Sixteen* (2004, Ken Loach, UK)

*Taste of Honey, A* (1961, Tony Richardson, UK)

*This is England* (2007, Shane Meadows, UK)

*This Sporting Life* (1963, Lindsey Anderson, UK)

*This Year's Love* (1999 Peter Kane, UK)

*TwentyFourSeven*, (1997, Shane Meadows, UK)

*Up the Junction* (1965, Ken Loach, UK)

*Young Soul Rebels* (1991, Isaac Julien, UK)

*War Zone, The* (1999, Tim Roth, UK)

## Abbreviations/Acronyms

ACE - Arts Council of England

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

BFI - British Film Institute

BECTU - Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union

CDN – Cultural/Creative Diversity Network

DCMS - Department for Culture, Media and Sport

DTI - Department of Trade and Industry

GLC - Greater London Council

GLA - Greater London Authority

IBA - Independent Broadcasting Authority

ITC - Independent Television Commission

ITV - Independent Television

LWT- London Weekend Television

MPA - Motion Picture Export Association of America

NFT – National Film Theatre

PACT - Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television

UKFC - UK Film Council















