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## **Where might I find you? Objects and internal space for the father<sup>i</sup>**

**Gail Lewis**

### **Abstract**

This article explores the relationship between objects and their role in the recovery of (my) the father. Its distinguishing features include use of lived experience as gleaned through memory in combination with cultural and post-Kleinian theory in an exploration of the internal space constituted by Oedipal dynamics and domestic space inscribed as “multi-racial”. Its mode is free-associative, mirroring the act of remembering. It offers a distinctive contribution to the psychosocial, diaspora and memory literatures in its attempt to chart the simultaneous expansion of internal space and shrinking of ‘racial’ space that made room for a complicated, yet uncertain, psychic recognition of (my) the father.

**Key Words:** Father; Racial and Oedipal Dynamics; Objects; Memory; Diaspora; Psychosocial;

## Introduction

Objects, Bollas (1992; 2009) tells us, are evocative. As internal objects, representations of figures introjected from early experience are evocative in two ways: as things evoked solely in the mind and as states of mind evoked by objects in the external world. As material things in themselves, particular objects affect us in ways linked to their own “atomic- specificity” or “specific use potential” (Bollas;1992:35). Drawing on this idea, multiple objects are conjured in the following narrative of experience, including songs from the Jamaican popular music canon, which, though rendered here only through the evocations they produce in me, had their own solidity in the form of the 78, 45 or 33rpm disc of vinyl and/or the tape that travelled from reel-to-reel. These and the other objects referred to, evoke an experience of father, that was and to some extent remains, uncertain and painful but which also shifted with changes in Britain’s racialized landscape and my psychic development to reveal a more solid and complex internal object I refer to as dad....Roy....daddy(?). The aim is to explore the ways in which these objects were doubly-inscribed as artefacts of the social world in which the dynamics of race and diaspora were prevalent and the internal world of oedipal and generational dynamics. They were the mechanism through which I conjured a man I knew as my father both as an internal object and an embodied and sentient being in the external world.

Following Bollas, the features linked to the specificity and structural integrity of the music include sound, hearing and listening as central to the mode of relating to self and other it evokes. This also includes silence, or the relationship between silence and sound which is key to music as a mode of expression and communication – think for example of the counterpoint of J.S. Bach or the syncopation of Monk’s *Mysterioso*. To borrow, quite outrageously from the work of diaspora and music scholar Tina Ramnarine, music, or at least my idiomatic experience of music’s evocations, might be thought of as a “mode of dwelling between two places” (2007:4) in which it became possible to increasingly, though

incompletely, find a place which my father inhabits within me. The site of the “dwelling between” is the space within and around me that is conjured by sound and other objects in which the child me and the remembering adult me coexist in the here-and-now of this telling and your reading. Thus in gesturing to the requirement of listening that music (and indeed psychoanalytic practice) imposes, I offer a mode of writing that is ‘experience near’, maintaining the integrity of that experience however multiply mediated, in a way suited to psychosocial inquiry (Lewis, 2009). In doing so, I aim at an epistemological practice that invites the internal and reading interlocutor to engage in a joint exploration of what it is that resonates between us by such a mode of presentation and also to induce thinking together as to the situated meaning, consonance or dissonance among divergent terrains of gender, generation, race, time, sound and other objects.

Given this, I offer a narrative staged as an imagined, ‘free associative’ conversation with my father, approximating the flow of talk around interpersonal intimacies, interspersed with forays into post-Kleinian and cultural theory. The aim is to conjure a relationship with a father, punctuated and made possible by objects in the context of Oedipal dynamics and a domestic space inscribed as ‘multi-racial’, comprising a white, English working-class mother and a black, Jamaican working-class father and their daughter(s).

## **Doing Dad**

I always said I didn’t have a dad, well that I had a father, two in fact, but I didn’t really have a dad. Some of my feminist friends and my feminist lover talked of adoring their dads, of how they had something special with them, that they brought joy and play and encouragement. They would speak of them as among the most important sources, enabling them to become what they had, achieve the things that they did – dads that had loved them and whom they had loved. They would speak too of the pains their dads had brought them

and then they referred to them as 'father', but even with this shift from the more intimate to the more formal, they conjured a man with whom they had a real relationship. They conjured a dad. I must say, dad.... Roy....daddy (?), I was bemused and slightly unbelieving. I mean it was not that I thought they were telling me outright lies, just that they were idealizing something and it was a bit of a romantic fiction. For the big question in my mind was: how could that be, what would it be like to have had a dad like the ones they portrayed? What is it that he would have done?

For so long and in some ways, dad....Roy....daddy (?), what I remember when I call you to my mind is waiting for you to come home, not waiting with expectancy and anticipated pleasure, not willing you to come home so I could run up to you and say: daddy look what I did today!! Daddy, let me show you!!, stamping my feet with impatience that you were *still* keeping me waiting even though you were now home. No, it wasn't that kind of waiting I recall, but waiting with slight fear of what would happen when you arrived, what change in the atmosphere would occur. Wondering would you and mum argue? Would you hit her? Would you leave again only to come back ... when, in hours or days? I don't know what I thought really, but I think I was scared of you, or was it the way you and mum were with each other? And who were you in my mind? I mean, you were called 'my dad' and that's what everyone said: Gail is Jean and Roy's child, and until I was 10 their only one, then Lorraine came and you had two children as far as I knew. But I think I was always unsure who you 'really' were and how I was to be with you.

I mean maybe it's like what those psychoanalytic people say, that who the father is to the child is in part the result of who the father is in the mind of the mother. It's a bit weird dad....Roy....daddy(?) isn't it, I mean the idea that I wasn't sure who you were or how to be with you because of some idea mum had of all that. But there might be something in it if we take a bit of time...would you mind that?...taking a bit of time while I try to explain a bit

more, because I'm not sure I ever asked you directly for some of your time. You see what they mean is that from the point of view of the mother-child pair, the father is someone who is outside and sort of interrupts the mother-child pairing. They say, that as the infant develops and grows into childhood, then she has to get used to dad being around and having his own relationship with mum and having a special role to play in enabling the child to enter the social world. They say in the long run that this is a good thing because by interrupting the mother/child couple and forcing acknowledgement of his presence, the presence of a third, the child will start to get a sense of her own identity and of herself as separate from both mum and dad. It means she has a relationship with each of them separately, but with them as a couple she can only watch from the outside, never really knowing about their relationship.

These post-Kleinians call it 'triangular space' (Britton, 1989) and, dad....Roy....daddy(?), all this has to be negotiated by the child as part of her working out of the Oedipal dynamics. And the thing is, it means developing a sense of your own place in the world, the social world, and also developing an internal space, sort of a space inside yourself; from there you can become an independent and creative person and at the same time not be scared of being separate *and* dependent, of sometimes being central to a relationship and sometimes being more in the background (Britton, 1989; Willoughby, 2001).

But getting to all that dad....Roy....daddy(?) can be really hard, and like I said, how the mum thinks of the dad in her mind's eye (and I suppose how the dad thinks of the mum as the mum of his child), affects it all, influences how the child sees him (Etchegoyen, 2002)

The mother, father and parental couple in the new mother's mind have particular impact and will influence the way her infant experiences father. There is no father without the child's mother, and the father-infant relationship has to be understood in

the context of the mother's relationships with the father and the child and how she thinks about and conducts these relationships (Marks, 2002:96).

Phew!! That was a long detour wasn't it? But it's helpful dad....Roy....daddy(?) because I think maybe some stuff did get in you and mum's minds – and from there to me. It was all confusing because some if it was like that Oedipal stuff I was saying but I think it got caught up with the social stuff in which you were a black man and mum a white woman and I was...well black and a girl. So many triangles: mum/dad/me; white/black/me – but in my mind just pairs – a racial same or a gendered same. And how did Bill, my Guyanese father, figure in all this? Because I think mum did find it hard to have a space in her mind for you as my dad, like she never let you adopt me did she? And I wonder if either she or you ever stopped being aware that you were not Bill and that Bill was the man with whom she had conceived me – a conception, which despite all her later ambivalence, was as ripe in her heart and mind as it was in her womb – even though he was so violent and she had left him.

Judging from your own violent reaction so many years later, when you had left mum and set up permanent home with what we came to know had been your long established second family, you hit her because you found out that Bill had been around. I was sixteen then and would no longer just accept your violence to mum and I took a baseball bat to you. You could easily have taken that from me and beaten me too but I think you were shocked and you stopped and left. It was awful and upsetting but I think what was equally astonishing was that you found it really hard to accept the existence of Bill, as if you were locked in a rivalry with him over who could occupy the most important place in mum's mind. But I'm drifting again, because in addition to the place Bill occupied in both your minds is the question of how wider social ideas about Caribbean men as men and fathers entered mum's mind and affected what she unconsciously passed on to me about you as father. Was that in

play and if so how did it work? What internal psychic meanings might have been accorded each of the parties to our Oedipal and racially inscribed triangular space in the interstices of our domestic life?

So maybe, dad....Roy....daddy (?) there is more behind my long repeated story of not having a dad and despite all that, you did in fact find some little corner in my mind to rest until I could more fully accept and take you in. I am thinking all this as I try to write something about how you came to feel different inside me, of how I became impelled to rewrite that story in a way that spoke of more than absence, that captured something of your presence even now. And as I struggle to find the next sentence, surrounded by the sounds of Bach's Orchestral Suites, forestalling the anxiety by doing the washing up, I find I have put my blue flannelette pyjamas on over my clothes just like you did when you were so cold when we lived in Kilburn! And I am singing *Hill and Gully Rider*, the old Jamaican folk song you taught me that we would sing together sometimes on a Sunday morning.

*Hill an gully rida,*

*(Hill an gully)*

*Hill an gully rida,*

*(Hill an gully)*

You were the call and I was the response. You told me it was what people would sing when they were coming home from dangerous work and wishing to reach home safe. This was when we were still living in Kilburn, before Lorraine was born in 1961, and you know what was amazing about it, was that at secondary school a new music teacher came and, well, she had a book of folksongs from around the world and there was *Hill and Gully*! And I knew it already. It also meant that somehow Jamaica..... and you dad...Roy.... daddy (?) were not so far away, were in the school for the first time and I knew something right for once.

So I think maybe I did have a dad like the ones I was to hear about years later, at least maybe some of the time. Maybe you did do dad type things with me and for some reason I just couldn't hold onto that, because the other side was too strong, too overwhelming. Then again, when I absent-mindedly put on those pyjamas that were so like yours, and when, out of nowhere, I started to sing under my breath *Hill and Gully*, was I trying to conjure you in the objects of clothes and sound? Was I subverting a narrative that was by now more like a lie than a story of self, adequate to the task of making life seem coherent and intelligible? I mean I don't know if you would be interested, even if I knew where you were and could tell you, but I have become a bit preoccupied with the question of lies. Lies in the sense that psychoanalysis conceives them, as something that is a common feature of our psychic life, yet from which we suffer and if we can begin to speak our psychic truth, begin to understand why we are lying to ourselves, grasp when it became a way of being, and why, then we may find some relief from the psychic pain (New, 1993). In that, dad, this psychoanalyst called Wilfred Bion, really got it about this lying thing, he thought that though unconscious, lies are stories that are meant to disguise, the emotional experience of someone or something that feels too much to bear, that they ward off catastrophe (Bion, 1970:97). As Lynne Layton puts it: "Lies may well be painful to live with, but they are less painful than the truth, which can threaten to annihilate the self" (2010:362)

Did you notice that I called you dad just then – when I was saying about lies? Maybe for a tiny moment it felt ok to say that, that it was a truth that was momentarily bearable. I don't know. But I know dad....Roy....daddy (?) that for the longest of times that is how I felt about you, about the connections between us, as if, were I to desire and claim that there was something more to the ways you brought me up than abandonment and abuse of mum, then not only would I be making the biggest betrayal of mum, and I think even Lorraine, but it would be too much for me to bear, might have been emotionally catastrophic.

It feels strange to say all this now even though it is quite obvious, but there are many objects that carry you for me, that signal how you are inside me. Like when I cook ackee and salt fish. I sometimes remember us on a weekend morning, if you hadn't worked a night shift, I would get in your and mum's bed and we would be either side of her and rock her gently saying "breakfast mummy, breakfast mummy" wanting her to get up and make us salt fish fritters and plantain for breakfast. They were special times even then and now I think of them as special because they are among the very few when it was all three of us and it was ok somehow. It felt safe and dad....Roy....daddy (?) it did on occasion feel safe.... just not always, and then I had to find ways to feel safe.

I think the music was like that, I mean a way I made myself feel safe. Safe outside and inside. Inside because it was something to hold onto, something that held me together, a kind of binding or glue. So the music came in to help me when I felt I was in the face of something that could pull me apart. Like how some people (Bull, 2000) think about the personal stereo equipment we now have. Of course we didn't have these things back then, I mean personal music equipment that is so small you can walk on the street, travel on the tube, or fly back to Jamaica listening to your own favourite music tracks. But some of the things written about what they may mean for people could have been said about me and the music back in Kilburn and Harrow. Listen to this for example:

...managing time and experience whereby [the users] construct sites of narrative and order in precisely those parts and places of the day that threaten experiential fragmentation (Bull, 2000:130, cited in Labelle, 2010:97).

I think this Michael Bull is really onto something: babies are thought to reach out for objects in that way if they don't feel that the one with them has them in mind and if they feel

uncontained (Bick, 1968). Like that time when I was left with you one weekday morning. Why was that? I'm not really sure, but maybe it was because you were working nights that week and had come in as mum was on her way out to work and maybe I was ill, but I remember it was after mum had knitted me what for a while was my favourite jumper – it was bolero style and it was green with cream edges and I loved it. But that morning I think it held me together dad...Roy....daddy(?) because I was so, so scared of being with you. Even now I can feel that dread in my stomach, a dread that was all-consuming and I know that while you were out of the room I sat on the sofa, my bed, and I cried a little bit. I didn't want you to see that, maybe because I thought you would tell me off, but I went and got my jumper and put it on, wrapped myself in my arms and stopped crying, and then *Greensleeves* came on the radio.... and that was that, I crumpled. I love that song, the melody, though it still brings tears to my eyes when I hear it. But somehow I think the music and the jumper and even the smell of the room glued me together, just enough to get through. They were something I could cling to, adhesion like.

### **Adhesions, Listening, Sounds**

Maybe even at around age six I was still using the music to hold me together; that perhaps it was precisely the musical sound that I had taken into myself as a binding force that I could rely on in the uncertainty of your presence. That just like a baby, I needed a “sensual object” (Bick, 1968 [2002]:56) that I felt would hold the parts of me together. Yet you know dad...Roy....daddy(?) it wasn't only this kind of experience and I think that made it all a bit confusing. Because sometimes I adhered to you like when *Banana Boat Song* with its *Day-O, day-O, Daylight come and me wan go home* rang out of the front room. I am right aren't I in recalling that sometimes, I mean very occasionally we, you and I, would play and sing those words together, well the chorus at least, while you were working on your Grundig reel-

to-reel tape recorder? Sing them out at the top of our voices? Because you see, I have the image of your hands holding a set of pliers, or carefully replacing one of those huge old-style glass valves in the radio, or re-sticking tape together that had snapped through over-use, or converting some old side-board into a drinks (no cocktail!!) cabinet full of back mirrors and lights, and us singing like that. But I can't remember or conjure up your voice. So maybe I have made it up, imagined it in some retrospective attempt to retrieve you – adhere to you in truth and detail.

In my mind, your hands always seemed such a very present part of you – and your ears. Your hands because they were big and slightly rough when you would rub my abdomen and chest with bay rum if I was sick, or cream my body with cremola after I had had my bath in that awful tin tub or even worse scullery sink. They were slightly rough and a little bit greyish white from where you needed to put cream because your work re-treading tyres would make them become dry, dulling the otherwise glow of the skin on your dark brown hands.

Sometimes though, your hands weren't rough though tender but rough and harsh – and oh so strong. Like that time when I did something that made you angry, I don't recall what now, and though you never, ever hit me, leaving that use of your hands for mum, you did one time hold my hands together by their wrists with just one of your hands and I was frightened and struggled to get free but I couldn't and you were saying over and over and over, "hush yu mout' an stan still". I don't think there was music playing then dad....Roy....daddy(?): just the sound of your command and my cries.

In contrast your ears always seemed so small, I noticed that right up until you and mum finally separated for good when I was fifteen and you were no longer sometimes with us on a Sunday, watching the film on the t.v. and waiting to eat jelly and carnation milk after our rice, peas and chicken. Your ears seemed small and much darker skinned to my child

eyes and I wonder what they heard dad....Roy....daddy(?) How does the ear react to all the vast array of sounds that enter into it invited or invasive and painful? I don't know, but I think dad....Roy....daddy(?) that I learned to listen partly by watching you. I mean you were so often just silently there, not saying too much, but I think you were always listening. Was that why you were always so fastidious with washing your ears? I think now maybe that was part of it, an unconscious concern to always be ready to hear even the slightest sound, but I think too that your ears were a sensuous organ for you. Because I remember how you would go all dreamy and enchanted like as you gently used a long chicken feather to clean around the creases of your ears. How you would seem momentarily in a kind of rapture ignoring the glance of distaste or even disgust that would briefly cross mum's face.

And it was with our ears wasn't it, I mean it was because we heard it before we saw it, that we realised something was happening and noticed that fat, pregnant mouse fall out of the chimney into the front-room that Saturday afternoon, while you were working on making lamps out of old bottles. I think we looked at each other and laughed in a surprised and nervous way as it scurried back up the chimney no doubt to soon increase the mouse population that roamed under the floorboards throughout that Kilburn Park tenement. I was so scared of those things and you brought the barely domesticated cat in to try and chase it away and moved the paraffin heater into the grate so that the heat and fumes might force that mouse away.

You know dad....Roy....daddy(?) there is something vital about sound, about sound and the listening that is the pivot of how or even whether we interact with others and the environment. The sound of your shoes with the repeated click-clack of the toe and heel caps as you walked down the corridor of the basement that was our part of the house in Kilburn. The sound of your laugh, always as if you were slightly embarrassed or attempting to stifle or even being choked by it, the absent sound of your voice, the sound of your eating and

drinking. Sounds of connectedness or its absence, sounds that conjure you in my mind or perhaps I should say that in conjuring them here I instantiate a reaching toward you in the backwardness of memory-time. So I think I am saying dad....Roy....daddy(?) that I listened to you and I listened with you, but did I ever listen from your point of view and did you ever listen from mine? I mean I think that from the point of view of my child self, it seems right that you as the parent should try to listen from mine as well as your own, that as you gave me parental guidance you should have been able to give me a sense that you were taking on board how I might see things. That would have been when we lived in the same place, when your presences and absences were embodied and sentient, felt through touch and smell, fear and uncertainty.

Now, when I don't even know if you are alive, or if dead, when and where you died, who was with you, and where you might be buried so that I could visit you, I feel some kind of urgency to listen from the viewpoint of you. You see, I do want to change that narrative of 'I never had a father' and to do that I need not just to dig deep and evoke all the ways I did – sometimes – have a father, but to forgive you in some way. And to forgive you means I must try to understand you a little and re-assemble you into an integrated whole in which the good and the bad parts of you become aligned into one whole, ordinary human being, ordinarily good and ordinarily bad (Segal, 1973). And, if I am to create the depth inside me to really see you as a whole person, to integrate your good and bad parts, then I have to face the way that I unconsciously hated and attacked you in my child, teenage and maybe even adult, mind. A bit like the way *Banana Boat Song* summons up a harsh and deceiving tally man whom the singer just wants gone, did I just want you gone. Did I unconsciously feel that you were taking mum away from me? Or if I thought she was gone, like sometimes I did, that you couldn't make it all alright again and so I hated you? Did I fear that you would be gone, or

want me to be gone? Was that part of why it was hard for me to hear the cry of *Day O*? And did I feel guilty?

I'm sorry if I'm talking in that Kleinian language again, but you know dad....Roy....daddy(?) it says some good stuff about how we might come to truly accept others as they are – and ourselves – and that is important for how we function in the world and use the objects inside us and out there in the world, objects like music. And it's full of ideas about listening and what it takes to do it (Freud 1912; Bion, 1967). You have to listen in a way that allows you to hear the emotional truth of what is being communicated, you have to listen in a way that allows real emotional contact and equally important that the one being listened to knows that this is how they are being heard. And all this means sometimes abandoning listening from our own point of view and taking up the stance of the other (Schwaber, 2007).

It's funny dad....Roy....daddy(?) how I've recalled all that stuff about internal life from thinking about the *Banana Boat Song* because that wasn't what I had meant to talk about. No, it was how mixed or double-edged I found that song to be in the world outside. Well not really the song but its popularity and the way that it made more porous the boundary between our Caribbean house and the world beyond it. I think it was around the late 1950s that the air was filled with the sounds of Harry Belafonte singing it, a time when there were all those anti-black riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham, and we were scared that our house would get attacked, and when you were out we were scared what would happen to you. So it was to do with the clash between the domestic space and its acoustic registers and what all that meant in the outside world. Because we had so many kinds of musical sound didn't we, depending which landing you were on. Mr. Clarence's floor to ceiling speakers boomed out his bluebeat and clashed with our jazz, both of which clashed with Miss May May's revivalist hymns and speaking in tongues. None of that troubled us but it did mark our house with its

multiple domestic spaces as the 'West Indian' house, West Indian in the sense of Michael MacMillan's *West Indian Front Room* (2005-06) and in the sense of 'no dogs, no blacks, no Irish', and that made us liable to attack from the Teddy Boys who lived alongside us. Yet they too liked black or black inspired music and would play Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Tommy Steele, Bill Hayley and all that sort of thing and Lord Kitchener had sung *London is the Place for Me* on arrival with the *SS Windrush* and in a way, adults and children, were making London our place to be. So it was confusing too about the music, like Brandon Labelle says

...noise is not only environmental disturbance. Rather, it remarkably provides a key experience for the establishment of an acoustic community *in the making*. 'Acoustic' here should be emphasised as not only sounds that come to circulate through a particular situation, but importantly, a relational exchange where sound is also voice, dialogue, sharing *and* confrontation... (Labelle, 2010:82, emphases in original).

So I don't really know what it was dad....Roy....daddy(?) but I think I also hated it when *Banana Boat song* came on, especially that white guy, you know who I mean, he used to play the guitar and adopt a kind of sing-songy kind of accent as if he was from the Caribbean, Lance something, Lance Percival?, and I would cringe because there was something about it that made me not want to be associated with that.

Did that mean dad....Roy....daddy(?) that I was not adhering to you, that I was saying that it would make me cringe if I was likened to you? Or maybe it was because I did in fact think or feel deep inside me, in a space created by the taking in of my white mum, that I was in fact like you and that this was not a good thing. As if I had taken inside me all the ways in which black people, Caribbean people, had been presented as a problem, as inferior, as

causing trouble, as needing to be cast out as the graffiti that surrounded us for a time suggested – all the ways in which I had been made to seem bad – and pushed my identification with that into you, dad....Roy....daddy(?), for you to carry for me, as if it was yours and not mine, not ours. Did you feel that? Know it somewhere in your own unconscious mind? Have a sense that somehow this daughter that was not your daughter by blood sometimes denied being your daughter by sound? So maybe I really did feel guilty for wanting to ‘kill’ you socially as well as psychically, for wanting to wipe you out from the world outside the doorstep and somehow knew I was colluding with the social inscription of your, my, our presence.

Yet, I would sing it dad....Roy....daddy(?), sing *Day-O, me say da-o* when I was out playing in the street or the bomb-site or swinging on the tyre-rope that Ray and me and some other kids made up the disused factory. So then, even if there was little integration between our domestic world and the social world beyond it and no easy triangular space inside me in which mum, you and me could come together, maybe as I sang it out loud maybe I was calling out our resemblance, calling it out in a Caribbean idiom increasingly acceptable to the public world of working class London. All those clashes were hard to sort out you know dad....Roy....daddy(?) because I think it felt like there would be too much loss, felt in my unconscious mind I mean.

### **Shifting terrains of home**

Have you noticed dad....Roy....daddy(?) that there is a thread about home running through all this? That in the songs in which, for me, you reside, the idea of and desire for home seems quite prominent. *Hill and Gully* sung as workers came home; *Day O* declares the longing for home – and you dad....Roy....daddy(?), did you long for home back in those days? Did the songs fill a hole in your soul, a hole put there by the departure from home that was Jamaica

even as you left for the supposed home of the ‘motherland’? Or was it more ambivalent than that – a tug of war between what was once and what might yet be. I think Jamaica must have been in your mind because it came to be so powerfully in mine. I inculcated a Jamaica of the mind and I was able to do that because of you.... well yes Miss Pearl and Mr. Clarence, Miss May May and Mr. Stickie, and Miss Dawkin and Mr. Mack (your mum and her partner); and all the others, but primarily because of you. It wasn’t only because of your accent, or how you dressed, so like the pictures of the men coming off the *SS Windrush*, or that we ate Jamaican food, but because I listened to you as you talked of Jamaica.

Like that time when we had a dad moment like I described my feminist friends and my lover has having. Somehow, after so many years of failing in my school work, I started to get it a bit and could understand things that the teachers were saying. We had moved from Kilburn and I was in the second term of the second year of secondary modern school, and despite all these seconds, I came first in the end of term exams!! It was like a miracle and none of us knew how to explain it, though maybe the Oedipal dynamic shifted and I could use my own mind and symbols even if I was sometimes an on-looker and not always central to the interaction between you and mum (Temperley, 1993). But to be honest I was pleased *and* embarrassed, knowing it would mean that I would ‘go up’ into the ‘A’ stream but none of my friends would come with me. Anyway I brought my report card home with my grades for each subject recorded aside a brief comment from the teachers. They were all glowing, even if sometimes betraying a hint of surprise. It was a Wednesday and mum and nan were delighted but you were not home and we didn’t even know if or when you would be so. You must have come in when I was asleep because all I can remember is that you came into my bedroom and woke me up and you were delighted with me!! You hugged me and smiled and said how proud you were and that this made your day. Dad, I was completely overwhelmed

because as far as I knew you were little interested in my school achievements and yet here you were, holding me with delight!

Soon after that night you showed me your own certificates from school in Jamaica. Cambridge University validated certificates for achievements in secondary education. I don't really remember what they were for exactly dad....Roy....daddy(?) but there they were: proof of your abilities and the educational standard you had reached. You told me about your apprenticeship to be an electrician and showed me those certificates too. You showed me on the map of Jamaica that was imprinted on your black wallet the general area where you had gone to school and talked to me again about the blue mountains where the coffee (that you never drank) came from, and about rainy Portland, that would become my favourite part of the island when I eventually went there so many, many years later, about bauxite, about Dunns River and Montego Bay and Fern Gully, climbing coconut trees and so many things about the land.

Those two occasions, so close together in my memory perhaps more for their emotional quality than for any real proximity in time, were so special for me daddy(?) and I cherished them in a silent and private way. I have a picture from around the same time, of you at a Christmas party and you are dancing and smiling and somehow it evokes your smiles of the night of my report and the day of your wallet. And it makes me think of that song by Millie, you know *My Boy Lollipop*, that delighted you so and was such a hit in Britain, the USA and even in Ireland.

*My boy lollipop*

*You make my heart go diddyap.*

I'm sorry but I seem to have lost my thread again. I was talking about home and I suppose I might also be thinking about the breakup of our domestic home because all of this school stuff and the wallet and Millie happened around 1964, when I was 13 and a couple of years later you and mum finally split up. You know dad...Roy....daddy(?), I don't know what I felt about that: maybe relieved because you were hardly there and mum was so unhappy, and who knows what nan was thinking. I wonder too if there is something about how London figured in your mind – was this home now? I'm not sure and I think you did eventually go back to Jamaica, with your by then Jamaican wife, and I heard but don't know definitely, that you were living up in the Montego Bay area.

But before you left, did London become a place called home, or an in-between place, not home but not away either, some place of settlement entwined with all of those people and places that would make up your life ... and am I counted in that? And did the rise of Jamaican and other Caribbean music help that? I mean though we weren't to know it at the time, Millie's *My Boy Lollipop* was among the things that announced the beginning of the huge impact that Jamaican music, from the island and from the diaspora, was to have on the popular music canon what with ska and rock steady and reggae and ragamuffin and dancehall. You know dad...Roy....daddy(?), I really think the rise of that music led to a shrinking of racial space and gave us more room to breathe. Tina Ramnarine says that in diaspora all sorts of things become entangled, including nation and generation and that people can conjure a space of home in diaspora and feel connections to multiple places where they do and don't reside. And she says something that I think unconsciously we knew, or I learned from you, which is that music has a central role in the making of diaspora:

Music is a way of telling stories about connections and particularities. Music provides an apt medium for thinking about diaspora: holding a crucial place in the

diasporic imagination, having the capacity to interrogate social theory, and raising complex questions about boundaries, identities and politics. Through the aesthetic, expressive and performance medium of music, diaspora is practised and enjoyed; experienced emotionally, somatically and temporally. In listening to people preserve the sounds of a home somewhere else and create new sounds inspired by their new environments, we become aware of overlapping domains, of complex geographies and temporalities of belonging. (2007:12)

And we might say dad....Roy....daddy(?) in the crafting of a father/daughter relationship.

### **A partial redemption**

A father/daughter relationship that inside me was/is so constrained and full of contrary dynamics and yet gave me some foundations by which I could become my adult-self as a black diasporic woman in London. So that by the time Bob Marley's *Redemption Song* seized the minds and hearts of the world, you had given me some of the coordinates by which to listen to and take him in. By then dad....Roy....daddy(?) I hardly saw you, with little to say if I did, so I have no memories of dad or not dad moments from that time. But I knew the difference between 'bald heads' and rastas, and I knew a tiny bit about how Rastafarians had been treated by Jamaican governments, and I knew the name of Marcus Garvey and the *Black Star Liner* company because you had told me about them oh so many, many years before. So you reside inside and outside me even in *Redemption Song*.

Redemption: the act of being redeemed; recovery of something.

Recovery of you perhaps dad, of you in all your fullness, good and bad, refusing and being refused, nurturing and in need of nurture. Redeemed somewhat in the external world of contemporary diaspora, redeemed somewhat in me. Because as music and other socio-cultural objects percolated beyond the Caribbean homes producing the diaspora spaces in which both migrant and settled move (Brah, 1996), racial space shrank or took on different shapes. And in the slip stream of that another space was emerging in me – a psychic space that you could occupy in a different way, what the Kleinians would call an integrated way.

But dad...Roy...daddy(?) if I have redeemed you in some ways there is still so much that remains unanswered: why did you go and never contact us? How can I ever recover from your violence to mum, violence that even in fictional depictions makes me cover my eyes and ears? How big a betrayal and of who if I ever forgive you? In redemption there is struggle and pain – and yet it is a redemption that I seek. I still need a father and it is you that I had, you that I seek...repeatedly.

*Old pirates, yes, they rob I,*

*Sold I to the merchant ships,*

...

*We forward in this generation*

*Triumphantly.*

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