



Black Female Creative Entrepreneurial Mothers of the Jamaican Diaspora
Navigating Power, Positionality and Upward Mobility in Transatlantic spaces.

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Ph.D. Thesis 2025

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For You

To every little girl raised in concrete jungles, in broken systems, in spaces that tried to shrink your brilliance: You are not invisible. You are not insignificant. You are dangerous to the lies they tell. You are a living act of defiance. This world tried to deny your power, but you were born with it in your bones. Never apologise for your magnitude.

To every woman forging life alone, stitched together by sacrifice and sleepless nights: you are not abandoned. You are not discarded. You are the blueprint. You are the storm and the sanctuary. Trust your own hands. Trust your own name. You are enough, you have always been enough. Keep building. Keep breathing. Keep believing.

To all of us who have known the hunger of the body and the hunger of the spirit, who have fought for scraps and still dreamed in full colour: we are not defined by scarcity. We are not the sum of our losses. We are the architects of new worlds. Our time is not coming; it is already here. Stand up. Take your place.

To the visionaries who dare to dream bigger than what survival teaches, who keep making, creating, risking, reaching: never trade your fire for their approval. One idea, one bold step, will shatter the ceilings you were never meant to crawl beneath. Your future is vast. Your spirit is unstoppable.

To the artists, the dancers, the singers, the writers, the painters, who bleed honesty into a world addicted to illusions: your art is revolution. Your voice is medicine. Your work is survival rewritten into freedom. Never let them sterilise your expression. Never let them tell you that your tenderness is weakness. It is your superpower.

If you leave with nothing else, carry this: You are not here to fit. You are not here to shrink. You are here to set fires and build new worlds. Trust yourself. Move like you know you are chosen. Create like you know you are eternal. Love like your heart can never be colonised.

You are the dream they tried to bury.

You are the future they cannot stop.

You are already winning.

With love, joy, and unbreakable solidarity.

Nayima

A Special Note to My Daughter, Nayima,

Thank you for choosing me.

Thank you for trusting me to walk beside you in this lifetime, through every beginning, every ache, every triumph. Being your mother has been the greatest lesson, the greatest adventure, the greatest blessing I could have ever hoped for.

You are an extraordinary young woman, radiant, wise, fierce, and tender all at once. And I am not just proud of you, I am in awe of you.

From the very beginning, you met life's storms with a grace and courage far beyond your years. You turned hardships into wisdom, fear into bravery, silence into art. In ways you may never fully realise, you have been my anchor, my reminder, my muse. There were nights when I questioned if I could carry everything, motherhood, work, creativity, research, survival and it was your quiet strength that carried me.

You have given me the permission to evolve. You taught me that "good mothering" isn't about perfection, it's about presence, about truth, about love that stays even when it's messy. You offered me grace when I struggled to offer it to myself. You saw me, even when I was invisible to the world.

In choosing me, you gave me the chance to become the woman I was always meant to be.

Our relationship, the laughter, the debates, the travels, the rituals, the ordinary days made sacred, is my sanctuary. You are my safe place, my best story, my wildest joy.

When I started my PhD, I didn't know how I would manage it all. I often felt like I was building the plane while flying it. But you, patient and grounded, reminded me every day that it was worth it. That we were worth it. You grew alongside me, and somehow, you still found space to be my comfort, my co-dreamer, my reminder that love and ambition are not opposites, they are twins.

I hope everything we have built, our struggles, our laughter, our bold leaps into the unknown, gives you the wings to dream without apology, to live in full colour, to claim every room, every opportunity, every destiny that calls your name.

You are limitless.

You are luminous.

You are already everything I ever hoped for, and so much more.

Thank you for choosing me to be your mother.

Thank you for teaching me how to love better, dream bigger, live freer.

I love you more than language could ever hold.

Always and all ways,

Mom.

Acknowledgements

I have been blessed with a community that has supported me along my journey. As a Black woman from Handsworth (B21), Birmingham, UK, a single mother, and a creative and evolving entrepreneur, on the path to becoming Dr Atkinson, I have been able to create a professional portfolio inclusive of creative praxis, research consultancy, lecturing, public speaking, organisational leadership, and entrepreneurship. This reality would not have been possible without the support, wisdom and love of many along the way.

Firstly, I must acknowledge that God (I AM that I AM, Yahweh, Jah) is at the centre of everything I do. I trust in His purpose and vision for my life and accept that I am a vessel for His work. For that, I am humbled and grateful to be Nathania, (meaning) "A gift of God".

I want to pay homage to my ancestors, thought leaders, activists, pioneers, revolutionists, and fearless warriors who paved the way before me so that I may dare to dream.

A special acknowledgement goes to my grandparents, Phyllis McCalla, Rosa May Atkinson, Nathaniel McCalla, and Emmanuelle Atkinson, for taking the risk to pursue greater aspirations, without your audacity to dream and selflessness to centre your vision for family I would not exist.

To my parents, Jeffrey Atkinson (may you rest in peace) and Barbara McCalla, I am grateful for the life you provided me with, your love, and the space and opportunity to become my highest self. This thesis only exists because I have been able to live an authentic life due to your unconditional love. Although my father is not here to see me reach this milestone, I find comfort in his words of wisdom and lifelong teachings. I know how excited and proud he would be of my honesty and vulnerability in completing this part of my journey.

To my family and friends who have supported me at each turn, I am truly grateful. There is no way to fully express my gratitude to all of you it is beyond words.

To my other mothers, (Aunt) Adassa McCalla, Caroline Shaw, (God Mother) Jennifer Cameron, Lillith Shaw, and Paulette Annon, thank you for your role in my life, your support, words of encouragement, and guidance have affected me in ways you would not know. I love you all. Jennifer Cameron, you are truly missed, but I know you are watching over me.

To my supervisors, Dr Wendy McMahon and Dr Victoria Cann, and bonus supervisor Dr Hillary Emmett, I appreciate your patience, trust, and belief in my ability to complete this journey through a pandemic and a series of life's tests and challenges. Thank you for

allowing me to be Nathania, “a girl with big dreams, sometimes introverted, a creative, a mum, and a Black woman navigating real life,” and for supporting me in becoming a grounded scholar.

To Tobijah Atkinson (cousin), thank you for being my soundboard, confidant, and cheerleader. Our endless conversations, debates, ideation sessions, and unconditional support have not only helped me through this PhD process but have also helped me become a more confident version of myself. To Bucka (Cousin) thank you for all the endless laughter, lifts, support, you continuously provide.

To everyone I have met along the way who has shared this space with me and trusted me with their stories, reflections, and dreams, I am honoured and inspired by you all.

And to the various people who have loved me, supported me, conversed with me, pushed me forward, provided opportunities, took risks, prayed, and fasted for this to manifest, I am humbled.

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Abstract

This thesis advances an original theorisation of Black Female Creative Entrepreneurial Mothers (BFCEMs) of Jamaican heritage, foregrounding their collective agency and resilience as they navigate power, positionality, and Social, Political, Economic, and Cultural (SPEC) mobility across transatlantic contexts, specifically the UK (Birmingham), USA (New York), and Jamaica. Centring the innovative framework of Transatlantic Diasporic Black Feminist Epistemology (TDBFE), the research integrates Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), Womanism (Walker, 1983), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999), and Trap Feminism (Bowen, 2021) to disrupt monolithic and deficit-oriented narratives about Black women's lives.

Employing original embodied Diaspora Embodied Praxis as methodology, including autoethnography, photo ethnography, reflexivity, and ethnomusicology, this thesis positions lived experience, cultural production, and sensory knowledge as legitimate, transformative analytics. The research demonstrates that BFCEMs use creative entrepreneurship not simply as a strategy of individual advancement, but as a radical, collective praxis for survival, resistance, and world-building. Empirical findings reveal that SPEC barriers, such as the motherhood penalty, racial bias, gendered adultification, and cultural misrecognition, operate both as constraints and as catalysts, driving BFCEMs to innovate new social and economic pathways through creative industries.

Black girlhood is theorised as a critical and autonomous phase, with adultification and systemic exclusion acting as triggers for later entrepreneurial resilience. Hip Hop and Dancehall cultures emerge as transnational platforms for identity negotiation, entrepreneurial practice, and legacy-building, while intergenerational entrepreneurship is shown to underpin family and community survival.

This thesis not only redefines BFCEMs as vital contributors to contemporary scholarship in Black Woman Studies, Black Girl Studies, and Black Motherhood Studies, but also advances embodied, decolonial research methodologies that centre affect, kinesthetics, and communal knowledge production. The findings illustrate how BFCEMs transform adversity into innovation, deploy creativity as a mode of resistance, and forge new legacies for Black women and families across the diaspora.



CONTENT WARNING



Applying trauma-informed practices has allowed me to acknowledge the experiences of harm represented throughout this research. This includes carefully considering the depth and explicitness of what is shared and how it is presented. Considering this, I have decided to include a content warning symbol to alert readers that the material may be distressing.

CONTENT WARNING: This thesis includes content that may be distressing, including but not limited to:

- Grief/Bereavement
- Racism
- Sexism
- Colourism
- Violence
- Misogynoir





PRESS PLAY



As you explore this work, you'll notice the Play symbol guiding you to a curated playlist. This musical selection isn't just an accompaniment but an integral part of the experience.

While the playlist stands on its own as a complete and independent musical journey, offering rich and diverse sounds that can be appreciated in isolation, its true depth unfolds when experienced in tandem with the thesis. The music has been thoughtfully woven into the narrative to enhance and deepen your understanding of the cultural, emotional political, economic etc themes discussed.

For a fully immersive experience, I encourage you to engage with the playlist at the designated points throughout your reading.



Introduction

This thesis investigates the intricate, often underrepresented, and underexplored experiences of Black Female Creative Entrepreneurial Mothers (BFCEM) of Caribbean heritage, navigating power, positionality, and upward mobility within transatlantic spaces. Specifically, it examines the intersectional challenges these women face as they transition through the stages of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood while operating as creative entrepreneurs in contexts that span the UK and the USA.

The central issues addressed in this thesis include systemic invisibility and marginalisation of Black women's voices and experiences within academic, creative, entrepreneurial and societal discourses, particularly those who meet at the intersection of Black mothers and creative entrepreneurs. By centring the embodied experiences of BFCEM, this thesis foregrounds the ways in which physical, emotional, and cultural realities act as sites of resistance and redefinition within a social, political, economic and cultural landscape that has often become forms of marginalisation. Through this focus on lived, embodied realities, the thesis intervenes by enriching Black Feminist Epistemology, demonstrating how BFCEM challenge, resist, and reimagine dominant narratives that have historically constrained their voices and agency.

Research Questions

The core research questions guiding this thesis are:

1. What systemic and socio-cultural challenges faced by Black girls, women, and mothers serve as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship?
2. How do Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers who are Black, British and of the Jamaican diaspora navigate and achieve positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment within transatlantic socio-political contexts?
3. How does Hip Hop culture influence the identity formation, entrepreneurial practices, and socio-political engagement of Black girls, women, and mothers, particularly in reshaping their roles as creative entrepreneurs?

Aims:

1. To explore the systemic, cultural, and personal challenges that influence Black girls, women, and mothers to pursue creative entrepreneurship.

2. To examine the strategies employed by Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers to navigate positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment in transatlantic spaces.
3. To critically analyse the role of Hip Hop culture in shaping the entrepreneurial identity and practices of Black women, particularly its influence on reimagining their roles as creative entrepreneurs.

Objectives:

1. Identify and analyse the key socio-cultural and systemic barriers encountered by Black girls, women, and mothers, particularly those that are Black British of the Jamaican diaspora, that act as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship.
2. Investigate the coping strategies, support systems, and networks that Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers use to navigate the socio-political landscapes of the UK and the USA.
3. Examine the influence of Hip Hop culture on the identity, agency, and entrepreneurship of Black women, focusing on its role in empowering them to redefine their socioeconomic and cultural roles.
4. Employ embodied methodologies, including autoethnography, photo ethnography, and ethnomusicology, to capture the lived experiences of Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers.
5. Contribute to theoretical discussions by proposing the Transatlantic Diaspora Black Feminist Epistemology (TDBFE) as a framework for understanding Black women's entrepreneurship in global contexts.

Hypothesis:

This thesis posits that Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers (BFCEM) who are Black British from the Jamaican diaspora leverage their unique intersectional identities and lived experiences, shaped by the challenges of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood, as catalysts for creative entrepreneurship. Through engagement with Hip Hop culture and other embodied practices, they challenge and redefine conventional paradigms of power, positionality, and mobility, using entrepreneurship not only as a means of economic survival but as a form of cultural resistance and identity reclamation within transatlantic spaces.

Importance and Rationale of the Thesis

This thesis is significant because it addresses a critical gap in Black Feminist Studies, specifically the literature concerning the lived experiences of Black girls, women, and mothers, particularly those from the Jamaican diaspora who engage in creative entrepreneurship. Current scholarship on Black girlhood, womanhood and motherhood has some limitations in its scope, focusing primarily on singular aspects of identity or experience, thus failing to capture the complex intersectional realities of these women (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Mirza, 2017). Moreover, the experiences of Black women in the Caribbean diaspora, especially those who navigate entrepreneurial spaces, remain underexplored in existing literature (Bryan, Dadzie, & Scafe, 2018; James & Busia, 2019). This research therefore responds to a pressing need for more nuanced, intersectional analyses that acknowledge the diversity and specificity of Black women's experiences across transnational contexts.

The thesis underscores the importance of authentic, first-person narratives in shaping a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Black women's lived experiences, challenging dominant narratives that often marginalise or distort their voices (hooks, 1981; Collins, 2000). Such narratives are crucial in reclaiming agency and visibility within both historical and contemporary contexts. Such narratives are essential in challenging the reductive and often stereotypical representations that dominate mainstream discourses, which frequently erase or distort the realities of Black girls, women, and mothers (hooks, 2000; Collins, 2016; Boylorn, 2017). By foregrounding these voices, the thesis contributes to the ongoing project of decolonising knowledge production, advocating for methodologies rooted in the lived realities of marginalised groups (Smith, 2012; Ahmed, 2021).

The innovative framework of "Transatlantic Diasporic Black Feminist Epistemology" (TDBFE) contributes to Black Feminist Studies and its sub-fields, Black Woman Studies, Black Girl Studies, and Black Motherhood Studies, by integrating key theoretical insights from Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), Womanism (Walker, 1982), and Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999), and offering an analytical tool that challenges the homogenised and monolithic narratives often imposed on Black women's lives. This approach not only enhances our understanding of the social, economic, political and cultural (SPEC) dynamics at play in the lives of BFCEM but also sets a precedent for future research that seeks to capture the full complexity of Black women's identities and experiences in a globalised world (Gilroy, 1993; Rose, 2008).

Contextualisation within Existing Research

Building on and extending the foundational work of scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Alice Walker, Joan Morgan and bell hooks, whose germinal contributions have illuminated the intersections of race, gender, class, age and Hip Hop in shaping the lived experiences of Black women. However, while these scholars have significantly advanced our understanding of Black womanhood, existing research often overlooks the unique experiences of Black female creative entrepreneurs. This thesis addresses this gap by foregrounding the perspectives of BFCEMs, a group whose narratives are frequently marginalised, under-explored or absent in scholarly discourse, social policy, creative industries and entrepreneurship. By doing so, it not only enriches the current literature but also challenges dominant paradigms that tend to homogenise Black women's experiences (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984).

Moreover, this thesis innovatively integrates alternative and embodied methodologies, such as autoethnography, photo ethnography, reflexivity, and ethnomusicology, into its research design. These methodologies are particularly suited to capturing the rich, multi-dimensional lives of BFCEMs, providing deeper, more nuanced insights that are often missed by conventional approaches. My personal autoethnography, for instance, allows for an intimate engagement with personal and communal narratives, offering a reflective and analytical insider's perspective that is vital for understanding the complexities of identity, power, and mobility within this group (Ellis, 2004; Boylorn, 2013).

"Echoes of Self" (Methodology overview)

This thesis introduces and applies a methodological framework titled Diasporic Embodied Praxis (DEP), a critical, multisensory, and decolonial approach developed to explore the lived realities of BFCEMs of Jamaican heritage across transatlantic contexts. DEP integrates autoethnography, photo-ethnography, sensory ethnography, ethnomusicology, unstructured interviews, and Black feminist reflexivity. It centres embodied, affective, and culturally grounded knowledge practices that foreground the emotional, spiritual, and corporeal experiences of Black women as valid and vital forms of inquiry.

Unlike conventional methodologies that often privilege detached observation or text-based analysis, DEP challenges Eurocentric epistemologies by placing memory, music, image, and self-narration at the heart of knowledge production. The framework is underpinned by TDBFE and draws conceptually from Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2020), Womanism (Walker, 1983), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2019), and Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 2015;

Bowen, 2021). It recognises that identity, resistance, and entrepreneurship are not only intellectual but embodied, sensory, and political acts.

Autoethnography anchors the study, allowing me to interrogate my own lived experiences as a BFCEM navigating creative labour, motherhood, and systemic exclusion. This is complemented by photo-ethnography and curated playlists that serve as both data and dialogue, rendering visible and audible the intergenerational, cultural, and spatial dynamics that shape BFCEMs' positionality and agency. Ethnomusicology, particularly through the lens of Hip Hop and Dancehall, provides critical insight into how soundscapes function as archives of memory, resistance, and diasporic connectivity.

DEP's methodological innovation lies in its insistence on feeling, movement, rhythm, and relationality as legitimate analytics. Through reflexive practice and co-creative engagements with other BFCEMs, the study maintains a commitment to ethical rigour, cultural accountability, and epistemic justice. In doing so, it not only contributes a novel approach to qualitative inquiry but also enacts a radical Black feminist methodology that reclaims how knowledge is felt, made, and shared.

"Unbreakable Legacies" (Literature Review Overview)

The "*Unbreakable Legacies*" literature review chapter provides an in-depth examination of the intersectional experiences of Black girls, women, and mothers of Jamaican heritage within British and transatlantic spaces. This section critically explores how the transition from girlhood to womanhood and eventually into motherhood intersects with creative entrepreneurship. The maturation process is framed within the context of systemic barriers related to race, gender, age, and class, drawing attention to the distinctive challenges faced by these groups.

The theoretical framework underpinning this exploration is "Transatlantic Diasporic Black Feminist Epistemology" (TDBFE), a comprehensive lens that integrates Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), Womanism (Walker, 1983), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999), and more recently, Trap Feminism (Bowen, 2021). TDBFE enables a nuanced understanding of how the visibility and invisibility of Black women in cultural, social, political, and economic arenas shape their identities and entrepreneurial trajectories.

The chapter also considers the importance of authentic narratives and self-representation in combating the erasure and marginalisation of Black women. By centring the lived experiences of BFCEMs, this literature review advocates for a richer, more inclusive

understanding of their journey toward empowerment and social mobility. Hip Hop, Dancehall, and Gospel music, as transformative cultural forces, are highlighted as integral to shaping the identities and entrepreneurial aspirations of these women.

Moreover, this literature review emphasises the importance of storytelling as a tool for empowerment. Citing bell hooks' theory of *"talking back"* (1989), it posits that the act of asserting one's voice is a radical gesture that disrupts dominant narratives and enables Black women to reclaim their agency. This literature review, through TDBFE, advocates for a more nuanced and inclusive scholarship that values Black women's perspectives, pushing against the historical silencing of their voices. The narrative weaves personal reflections with scholarly analysis, offering a rigorous examination of how Black women, through their cultural and entrepreneurial endeavours, build *"unbreakable legacies"* in the face of systemic challenges.

"Frames of Power" A Photo Ethnography (Overview):

The chapter titled *"Frames of Power": A Photo Ethnography* presents a deeply personal and visual exploration of identity, family legacy, and the intergenerational experiences of my personal journey through Black girlhood, womanhood and motherhood towards creative entrepreneurship. Through a blend of photo essays and reflective narratives, I delve into the patriarchal foundations that have shaped my life, highlighting the roles of key figures including grandmothers, parents, and daughter. This photo ethnography serves as a tribute to the women who have influenced her journey, exploring themes of motherhood, style, Black love, and the enduring impact of cultural heritage. The photo ethnography is not only a celebration of familial ties but also a commentary on the broader socio-cultural experiences of Black women/ BFCEMs across generations, particularly in the context of migration, resilience, and empowerment.

"My Own Muse", the photo ethnography materialises the experience of BFCEMs by presenting a deeply embodied narrative of cultural resilience and intergenerational continuity. Employing photos of family, style and fashion, and representations of motherhood, and othermothering, the chapter weaves my personal history alongside collective experiences of Black families and community connectivity familiar with Black British Jamaican heritage communities. This embodiment is further evoked in the reader through the visceral connection to visual imagery, lived practices, and the spatial dynamics of Black homes, inviting the reader into an intimate encounter with their own familial and cultural memories. Grounding the research in the lived experiences of Black women, as Patricia Hill Collins suggests, reveals how knowledge production within Black communities is

intricately tied to these embodied, everyday practices of survival and care, further emphasising the intersectionality of race, gender, and family dynamics."

The use of family photos within this photo ethnography chapter offers a powerful means of materialising Black female lived experiences through girlhood, womanhood and motherhood. Particularly through moments of resilience, love, community and connectivity. Drawing on Tina Camp's analysis in *Listening to Images* (2017) everyday photographs serve not only as visual documents but as sites where embodied histories and narratives are inscribed, allowing for deeper insights into the lives of Black families. These images ground the reader in the emotional and physical spaces Black families navigate, with personal photographs evoking the intergenerational practices of nurturing, care and love. Through representations of other-mothering, the chapter echoes Audre Lorde's work on the ways Black women navigate identity and oppression, materialising the collective practice of motherhood and the transmission of wisdom across generations. This deeply interconnected role of care, often extended beyond biological ties, resonates with readers, who may experience a similar embodiment of familial and cultural memories in their own lives.

Furthermore, fashion and cultural expression become critical vehicles for exploring the embodied agency of Black women. As bell hooks discusses in *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, (2015), identity, family, and home are inseparable from how Black women materialise their sense of self and community. Through clothing and adornment, the photo ethnography illustrates how I as a Black woman, navigate societal expectations while asserting personal and political identities. This embodied practice of self-presentation becomes a testament to survival and creativity. Sara Ahmed's concept of happiness and embodied experiences in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) also comes to life here, as fashion becomes a medium through which Black women craft spaces of joy, connection, self-expression and resistance. As readers engage with the intricate narratives woven through images and stories of survival, they become participants, embodying their own experiences of race, gender, and culture, as Jennifer Nash advocates in her reimagining of Black feminist thought. This fluidity between visual storytelling and reader embodiment allows the research to evoke a deeply personal and collective connection with Black womanhood and familial continuity.

Integrating ethnomusicology into this photo ethnography elevates the embodied experience by weaving together sound and image, creating a multisensory exploration of Black girlhood, womanhood, motherhood family and creativity. The song lyrics and music have been curated to not only amplify the visual representation but also evoke emotional and cultural memories that resonate with the lived experiences of BFCEMs and the reader. Drawing on Tina Camp's concept of *Listening to Images*, (2017), sound becomes another layer of

embodied memory that deepens the engagement with the narratives presented. Ethnomusicology, as explored by Kyra Gaunt in *The Games Black Girls Play* (2006), demonstrates how music functions as a cultural text, carrying generational knowledge and communal identities. This integration of sound within the visual story parallels Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) notion that emotions are shaped by social and cultural practices, allowing for a richer understanding of how Black women's lives are both seen and felt across time and space.

Phase 2- Rhythms of Resistance -Ethnomusicology (Overview)

This chapter interrogates the intricate relationships between music, identity, and the lived realities of BFCEMs. It positions genres such as Hip Hop, Dancehall, and Gospel not merely as entertainment, but as cultural and spiritual artefacts, central to shaping the personal and professional trajectories of BFCEMs, and fostering resilience and creativity within oppressive environments. Here, music emerges as a critical tool for identity formation, self-expression, and entrepreneurial aspiration, deeply embedded within the SPEC landscape of the Transatlantic Diaspora.

Anchored in the framework of TDBFE which draws from Black feminist thought, womanism, intersectionality, Hip Hop feminism, and Trap feminism, this chapter examines how musical genres become sites of resistance, empowerment, and transformation for Black women. TDBFE foregrounds the primacy of lived experience and cultural expression in challenging oppressive structures, particularly for Black women navigating intersecting SPEC barriers. Drawing on foundational scholarship (Patricia Hill Collins, 2000; Joan Morgan, 1999; Sesali Bowen, 2021), I situate music as both a liberatory and contested space for BFCEMs.

Joan Morgan's (1999) concept of Hip Hop feminism is central here: Hip Hop is a space of contradiction, offering both empowerment and exploitation for Black women. Morgan's call to "unapologetically embrace the contradictions inherent in being Black and female" is essential to understanding how BFCEMs navigate a male-dominated music industry while carving out space for self-definition and economic agency. In parallel, Bowen's (2021) Trap feminism illuminates how women in marginalised communities use Trap music to assert their lived realities as valid forms of feminist praxis. These frameworks underscore the complex balancing act of BFCEMs, leveraging the empowering potential of music while contending with the persistent misogynoir embedded in these genres.

Trailblazers such as Queen Latifah and Lauryn Hill have played pivotal roles in reimagining Black female identity within Hip Hop, challenging gender norms and asserting narrative

control. Ethnomusicologists like Keyes (1999) and Maultsby (2000) document how Black women have historically used music as a vehicle for self-determination and community-building. Keyes' generational analysis of female rap demonstrates how each wave of artists has reshaped the terrain of Black womanhood and entrepreneurship. These narratives of resilience are especially resonant for BFCEMs, whose entrepreneurial pathways are profoundly shaped by both the empowering and commodifying dynamics of the music industry.

My personal journey as a BFCEM further animates this analysis. Shifts in my musical affinities, from Hip Hop and Dancehall to Gospel, mirror deeper transformations in my values, spirituality, and professional ambitions. Gospel music, particularly artists like Lecrae and Mali Music, offers a spiritual anchor that challenges the materialism and hyper-commercialism prevalent in Hip Hop, resonating with Stanley-Niaah's (2010) exploration of spirituality's role in Dancehall and Gospel.

Engaging with these musical genres, this chapter offers a nuanced, reflexive analysis of how BFCEMs use music to navigate the intersections of race, gender, and entrepreneurship in spaces that both marginalise and celebrate them. Through both personal reflection and critical scholarship, I underscore music's power as a site of resistance, resilience, and creativity, while critiquing the capitalist and patriarchal forces that continue to exploit Black women's cultural production. In doing so, this chapter affirms the enduring role of music as both battleground and sanctuary for BFCEMs and the wider Black female community.

This chapter also introduces the immersive and audio element of this thesis which is the playlist which can be listened to via either link Spotify:

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1HBc2koiP5Hh5GOZdBGWoA?si=3_dhxg3eSOSOb9lpj_WyOg

Apple: <https://music.apple.com/gb/playlist/intricate-mastery/pl.u-JPAZBZZIDWeaVx9>

Phase 3 – Embodied Mastery (Autoethnography Chapters)

The Last Dance

The chapter titled "*Last Dance*" serves as a pivotal exploration of the intersectionality of faith, motherhood, and identity formation within the experiences of Black women, particularly in the context of creative entrepreneurship as BFCEMs. Drawing on Black feminist theory and intersectionality, the chapter addresses the overarching thesis question regarding the pressing issues that catalyse entrepreneurship among Black girls, women, and mothers.

Through an autoethnographic approach, it delves into how I as a researcher and participant and BFCEMs perform an intricate dance between systems of oppression, such as anti-Black racism and hegemonic norms, while balancing our roles as mothers and entrepreneurs, with relevance to the wider collective of BFCEMs. The chapter further highlights maternal practices and "othermothering" within Black communities as critical sources of resilience and empowerment. By reflecting on both my own personal narrative and theoretical frameworks, "*Last Dance*" provides valuable insights into the complexities of maturation between Black girlhood, motherhood and womanhood, on a path toward creative entrepreneurship.

Mother-Hood

The chapter "*Mother-Hood*" deepens the critical autoethnographic examination of Black single mothers, grounding the analysis in Black feminist theory and intersectionality. It draws on thought leaders such as Collins (2000) and hooks (1981) to explore the complex intersections of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in the journey toward entrepreneurship. The chapter engages with Black feminist spatial imagination, incorporating key scholarship from McKittrick (2006) on geography and the lived experiences of Black women in hostile environments. By situating Black motherhood within the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism, the chapter highlights how spatial and environmental factors shape Black women's lives and entrepreneurial paths. Thought leadership on entrepreneurship, including Boyd's (2000) disadvantage theory, contextualises how economic precarity can propel marginalised individuals toward creative entrepreneurship. "*Mother-Hood*" ultimately emphasises Black women's resilience and agency, offering a nuanced understanding of the generative and obstructive forces that influence their roles as mothers and entrepreneurs.

X3!

The chapter "*X3!*" delves into the multifaceted journey of Black female creative entrepreneurship within the music and entertainment industry, framed through the lens of Hip Hop culture. This chapter builds upon previous discussions of Black women's navigation of systemic challenges, focusing on how Hip Hop serves as a space for creative entrepreneurship, identity formation, and community empowerment. By engaging with the Transatlantic Diaspora Black Feminist Epistemology including theoretical frameworks such as Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, Hip Hop Feminism and Womanism the chapter

explores the intersections of capitalism, cultural identity, and spiritual connectivity in shaping the entrepreneurial endeavours of Black women and BFCEMs.

"X3!" responds directly to the thesis question regarding the influence of Hip Hop culture on Black female creative entrepreneurship and how Black women have re-imagined and redefined this space. It examines the transformative power of entrepreneurship to challenge societal norms and foster social change, particularly for Black single mothers. The narrative also underscores the importance of family support, cultural resonance, and purpose-driven entrepreneurship in navigating the complex landscape of the music and entertainment industry. Through a critical and reflective approach, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of how Black women specifically BFCEMs leverage entrepreneurship as a tool for empowerment, mobility, and community upliftment.

I Am My Father's Daughter"

"I Am My Father's Daughter" is a deeply personal autoethnographic chapter that explores the emotional complexities of grief, resilience, and the quest for stability and healing in the face of adversity. The chapter reflects on the profound impact of my father's legacy, particularly his role as a legal professional who established a firm dedicated to Black excellence and community empowerment. The narrative uses personal experiences to expose how systemic barriers rooted in race and power dynamics uniquely shape Black professionals' lives, in this case within legal frameworks. Through this lens, the chapter underscores how music functions as a counterbalance to these institutional barriers, offering a spiritual and emotional refuge. Music emerges not only as a form of resistance but as a vital medium for self-definition, enabling Black communities to transcend the limitations imposed by societal structures. By engaging with music's spiritual dimensions, the chapter reveals its role in fortifying identity across generations, fostering resilience, and sustaining familial bonds amid the weight of systemic oppression. This intergenerational engagement with music highlights its capacity to cultivate a sense of unity and belonging that transcends SPEC challenges, anchoring Black identity in both resistance and collective healing. By drawing on African Caribbean and Black diasporic perspectives on interconnectedness, the chapter underscores the importance of music in shaping social identity and fostering community cohesion.

"I Am My Father's Daughter" provides valuable insights into how personal loss and adversity can drive the pursuit of entrepreneurship and social change. It emphasises the importance of resilience, bravery, and advocacy in navigating systemic barriers and contributing to the ongoing struggle for racial justice and empowerment within marginalised communities.

Becoming Miss Nathania

"*Becoming Miss Nathania*" is a reflective and critical chapter that explores the intricate challenges faced by BFCEMs as they navigate societal expectations, spiritual practices, and systemic barriers within and beyond academic settings. The chapter delves into the psychological impact of stoicism imposed on Black women, revealing how societal pressures to suppress emotions contribute to long-term mental health issues and hinder opportunities for authentic emotional expression and healing. Through a nuanced examination of the evolving role of spirituality within Black communities, the chapter highlights a shift from traditional religious practices to more personal, introspective spiritual experiences, suggesting a critical pathway for collective healing and self-discovery.

The chapter also addresses the enduring impact of colourism and colonial influence on the identities of the African Caribbean diaspora, drawing from personal experiences in Ghana. This discussion underscores the pervasive legacy of colonialism, which continues to shape contemporary African and diasporic identities, particularly concerning skin colour, beauty standards, and the broader sense of belonging. By critically examining these issues, the chapter advocates for a reclamation of cultural narratives that honour the diversity and resilience of the African Caribbean diaspora.

Moreover, "*Becoming Miss Nathania*" provides a critical lens on the systemic barriers that Black women face within academia as students/staff/ women, and mothers, emphasising the need for institutional accountability and the development of more inclusive practices. The chapter calls for a reassessment of existing structures that perpetuate inequality and advocates for the creation of supportive environments where Black women/BFCEMs can thrive emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. By engaging with these critical questions, the chapter contributes to the broader discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion within academic spaces and lays the groundwork for further scholarly inquiry and practical interventions to alleviate the burdens placed on Black women and BFCEMs.

Muva Hustler

The chapter titled "*Muva Hustler*" delves into the nuanced and complex intersection of creative entrepreneurship, race, gender, and the commodification of Black bodies, particularly within the context of the strip club environment. Through a critical lens informed by Black feminist thought, the text explores the multifaceted ways in which Black women/marginalised women navigate power dynamics, economic exploitation, and societal expectations. It situates these experiences within broader discussions of capitalism, female

empowerment, and the influence of Hip Hop culture, examining how these forces both empower and exploit marginalised women. The document also reflects on the contradictions inherent in the discourse around agency and autonomy, questioning the authenticity of empowerment within capitalist structures that commodify and marginalise. By engaging with theoretical frameworks and personal narratives, the chapter provides an analysis of the social, political, and economic landscapes that shape the lives and choices of BFCEMs in the creative and informal economies.

My Own Muse

My Own Muse explores the transformative journey as a BFCEM navigating the amalgamation of creative practice, research, and strategy as a professional practice while navigating significant global events, employment entrepreneurship and bereavement. The narrative is grounded in the principles of TDBFE. The chapter weaves together personal and professional progression on the route towards upward mobility through entrepreneurial ventures, highlighting the resilience and adaptability required to thrive in environments often hostile to Black women and BFCEMs. It examines how fashion, style, and creative expression are employed as tools of empowerment, reclaiming my identity and agency in the face of societal expectations and economic pressures.

Findings, Insights and Recommendations

This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the lived experiences and challenges faced by BFCEM within transatlantic spaces, focusing on their journey through creative practice, and entrepreneurship, offering a nuanced understanding of how BFCEMs utilise creative entrepreneurship as a means of survival, resistance, and personal and collective empowerment. The chapter also highlights the significance of Hip Hop culture as a source of inspiration and a tool for redefining identity and entrepreneurial strategies.

Key Findings

This thesis demonstrates that BFCEMs in transatlantic contexts mobilise creative entrepreneurship as a collective praxis of resistance, survival, and community transformation. By theorising creative entrepreneurship through the lens of Transatlantic Diaspora Black Feminist Epistemology (TDBFE), this research repositions entrepreneurial activity as a communal response to intersecting oppressions, race, gender, austerity, and economic precarity, rather than a narrative of individual ascent.

Empirical findings reveal that systemic barriers, such as the motherhood penalty, racial bias, and cultural misrepresentation, function not only as obstacles but also as generative forces, driving BFCEMs to innovate new economic and cultural strategies. Black girlhood emerges as a critical, autonomous phase: adultification, stereotype threat, and educational exclusion shape the conditions for later entrepreneurial resilience. Hip Hop culture, as both methodology and milieu, becomes a site of identity negotiation and a transnational resource for reimagining Black womanhood and entrepreneurial possibility.

Intergenerational entrepreneurship is shown to be foundational: BFCEMs transmit creative and cultural capital across generations, ensuring familial and communal resilience. Whether in Birmingham, New York, or Kingston, creative enterprise is practised as collective world-building, a deliberate reworking of dominant socio-economic narratives.

Theoretically, this work positions TDBFE as an original analytic framework, synthesising Black Feminist Thought, Womanism, Intersectionality, Hip Hop Feminism, and Trap Feminism to rigorously account for the layered realities of Black women's entrepreneurship in transatlantic spaces.

Ultimately, these findings show that BFCEMs turn adversity into innovation, deploying creativity to resist erasure, build community, and author new legacies. My own autoethnographic journey is woven throughout, situating me within and alongside this dynamic community, and underscoring the imperative to centre lived experience and collective creative praxis in contemporary scholarship on Black womanhood, entrepreneurship, and social change.

Unbreakable Legacies: Black Feminist Epistemology and the Reclamation of Creative Power. (Literature Review)

Themes: Transatlantic Diaspora Black Feminist Epistemology, Black Feminist Epistemology and Praxis, Black Girlhood, Black Womanhood, Black Motherhood, and Maturation

“The best thing I learned from a woman, was the power of the heart, to see it working in their life and seeing how it turns out.”

-Nipsey Hussle

Introduction

This literature review chapter contributes to ongoing efforts to challenge the homogenising conceptualisations of Black girls, women, and mothers' lives and experiences, conceptualisations that often fail to recognise the complexities of their mobility, positionality, and power as they navigate both British and transatlantic spaces. By critically engaging with the intersections of race, gender, and class, this chapter foregrounds the unique challenges and systemic disadvantages Black Female Creative Entrepreneurial Mothers (BFCEM) face within these socio-political, economic, and cultural (SPEC) contexts.

I situate the salient constructions of BFCEM within this thesis by focusing on Jamaican heritage, Black British, and creative entrepreneurial mothers. This exploration reflects the transformation and maturation of Black girlhood into womanhood and motherhood, contributing a critical voice to the transnational, intersectional, and intergenerational tapestry of lived experiences. These experiences expose persistent discrimination within the SPEC landscape, whether in the UK or across the transatlantic.

Further, by unpacking the intersectional experiences of race, gender, and age, this chapter broadens the discussion to include the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of Black women. It highlights how the voices of Black girls, women, and mothers have often been muted

through their maturation and their negotiation of power, social mobility, and positionality in these spaces. This dynamic of muted voices is key to understanding how Black women have been historically erased from dominant narratives, yet are simultaneously central in shaping cultural and entrepreneurial spaces, particularly through their resilience in creative industries like Hip Hop and Dancehall.

This literature review and the wider thesis acknowledge that Black womanhood, Black girlhood, and Black motherhood are not monolithic. To this end, the chapter draws on key thought leadership from Black feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Aria Halliday (2022), bell hooks (1999), and Heidi Mirza (2001) to contribute to the dialogue concerning intersectionality, racism, sexism, body politics, wealth, education, and the lived experiences of Black women across the transatlantic.

The chapter is structured into the following sections:

Theoretical Frameworks: This section introduces the Transatlantic Diaspora Black Feminist Epistemology (TDBFE), which synthesises multiple frameworks, including Collins' Black Feminist Thought (2000), Womanism (Walker, 1983), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999), and Trap Feminism (Bowen, 2021). The blending of these theoretical frameworks offers a nuanced lens through which to explore Black women's lived experiences, their entrepreneurial journeys, and their creative responses to oppression.

Reclaiming Narratives: Leaning into bell hooks' idea of "*Talking Back*," this section emphasises the significance of reclaiming and holding space for authentic Black female narratives. The act of "*Talking Back*" symbolises a gesture of defiance against oppression and a reclaiming of Black women's voices in spaces where they have been historically marginalised or silenced.

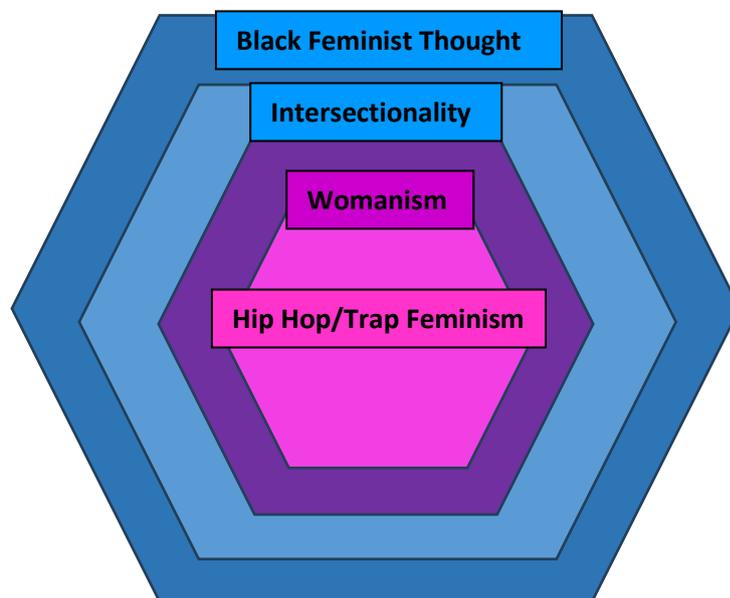
Epistemology and Praxis: This section interrogates how Black feminist epistemology is produced and enacted through the intellectual contributions of Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Aria Halliday, and Ruth Nicole Brown. These scholars provide a foundation for understanding how Black women's personal lived experiences reflect and resist broader systems of oppression, particularly in the realms of race, gender, and entrepreneurship.

Explorations of Black Girlhood, Womanhood, and Motherhood:

The final sections delve into the developmental journey of Black women as they navigate societal challenges from girlhood to womanhood and ultimately motherhood. By examining these stages, the chapter highlights how Black women's identities evolve within the SPEC landscapes that continually seek to undermine their agency but simultaneously draw from their resilience and cultural capital.

Theoretical Frameworks "Transatlantic Diaspora Black Feminist Epistemology" (TDBFE)

This chapter intricately interweaves multiple theoretical frameworks, Black Feminist Thought, (Collins, 2000), Womanism, (Walker, 1983), Intersectionality, (Crenshaw, 1989), Hip Hop Feminism, (Morgan, 1999) and Trap Feminism (Bowen, 2021), which I have titled **"Transatlantic Diasporic Black Feminist Epistemology" (TDBFE),** this framework succinctly conveys the comprehensive perspectives by synthesising them into a coherent analytical tool that challenges homogenising conceptualisations and addressing the unique challenges faced by Black girls, women, and mothers who are Black British and of Jamaican heritage as creative entrepreneurs in transatlantic spaces.



Black feminist thought

Black feminist epistemology and Black feminist thought provide critical lenses through which Black women's unique experiences and knowledge systems are foregrounded. I use these frameworks to dive deeper into the complexities of Black female maturation, interrogating the

intersecting forces that contribute to the adultification of Black girls and the subsequent erasure of Black girlhood, through a critical analysis informed by the wholeness of the transatlantic Diaspora Black feminist epistemology. I explore the implications of Black female identity formation, agency, and empowerment of Black girls, women, and mothers in the journey towards creative entrepreneurship. Additionally, throughout the wider thesis, I explore potential avenues for reclaiming and centring the narratives of Black girlhood from an independent standpoint. A standpoint that highlights how societal perceptions and biases uniquely shape the lived experiences of Black girls (Epstein et al., 2017). By examining these dynamics, the thesis enriches our understanding of the multifaceted experiences Black girls encounter as they navigate their journeys to womanhood and beyond. This approach acknowledges the intersectionality of race, gender, and age, which contributes to the distinct challenges and resilience exhibited by Black girls (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). Ultimately, centring their narratives is crucial for fostering empowerment and promoting social change.

Through the examination of Black female maturation within the framework of the TDBFE, the thesis reveals that Black girls are confronted with a complex web of social, political, economic, and cultural forces such as education, criminal justice, employment, health, financial resources and media, that contribute to their lived experience and adultification in wider society. As noted by Smith (2019), this adultification phenomenon perpetuates a landscape where Black girls are prematurely perceived and treated as adults, negating their experiences of childhood and Black girlhood. Halliday (2016) further underscores the troubling consequence of this adultification by highlighting how the exclusion of Black girlhood from societal discourse renders it both unimagined and unimaginable. This omission creates a critical gap in understanding the journey of Black girls as they navigate the transition from girlhood to womanhood and, often, to motherhood. This is fundamental in understanding the nuanced journey toward the thesis's overall exploration of becoming a Black female creative entrepreneur.

Womanism

Womanism (Walker 1983) in some literature used interchangeably with Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) is based on both theoretical frameworks supporting the common agenda of Black women's self-definition and self-determination, alongside struggles against racism and sexism, (Omalade, 1994). Womanism is employed in the TDBFE based on its commitment to the survival and wholeness of the entire people both Black Men and Women. This enriches analysis by emphasising the interconnectedness of race, gender, and social

class, thereby underscoring the holistic nature of Black women's lived experiences and how they impact their communities.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, as articulated by Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (2000), remains foundational for analysing how overlapping social identities and interlinked systems of oppression influence the experiences of Black women. In addition to these theorists, newer voices like Moya Bailey, who coined the term "misogynoir," expand our understanding of how media portrayals of Black women perpetuate systemic inequalities (Bailey, 2022). Similarly, Sesali Bowen's concept of "trap feminism" challenges reductive stereotypes associated with Black female identities while celebrating cultural expressions unique to Black communities (Bowen, 2021). Additionally, scholars like Catherine Knight Steele emphasise how digital platforms can be leveraged to amplify Black feminist thought and activism, reshaping narratives around Black womanhood in contemporary society (Steele, 2022). Employing intersectionality as both a conceptual lens and analytical tool within TDBFE, I contribute to the reclamation, preservation, dissemination and embodiment of the complex, multilayered identities of BFCMs, revealing how social inequalities and systemic oppression are navigated.

Hip Hop Feminism/Trap Feminism

Hip Hop feminism, as a critical framework emerging from the intersection of Hip Hop culture and Black feminist thought, provides a powerful lens for addressing the central research questions of this thesis. Rooted in the lived experiences of Black women within Hip Hop, this framework challenges patriarchal and misogynistic narratives while simultaneously embracing the potential for empowerment embedded within the culture. Joan Morgan's pivotal assertion that Hip Hop feminism "demands that we simultaneously hold in tension both the brilliant and the problematic" (Morgan, 1999), a challenge discussed in both the "X3" chapter and "*Muva Hustler*" chapters later in this thesis. This is a key component to understanding the contradictions that Black women, particularly those engaged in creative entrepreneurship in Hip Hop. This duality allows for an analysis of the ways Black women use Hip Hop culture not only as a means of survival but as a tool for empowerment and identity reclamation.

Sesali Bowen's concept of trap feminism further extends the reach of Hip Hop feminism by focusing on the experiences of working-class Black women. Bowen highlights how these

women employ "ghetto girl" aesthetics and "bad bitch" personas as subversive forms of resistance against both patriarchal and capitalist structures, explored in the "X3I", "*Muva Hustler*" and "*Rhythms of Resistance*". Each chapter is situated in a specific era and stage of Black female maturation. Sesali Bowen states, "Trap feminism is the politics of respecting how Black women who occupy those spaces resist domination in their own unique ways" (Bowen, 2021). This concept challenges the classist tendencies within both mainstream feminism and Hip Hop culture itself, making room for an inclusive feminist praxis that celebrates the agency and resistance strategies of underserved Black women. The unique aesthetic and cultural expressions embraced within Hip Hop feminism and by extension trap feminism as part of the TDBFE further illuminate how Black women assert their agency in environments that often seek to marginalise them but also offer an embodied and nuanced understanding that brings visibility to BFCEMs and Black women as a whole in a holistic and meaningful way.

Within the context of this thesis, the integration of Hip Hop feminism and trap feminism within the TDBFE critically addresses the key research questions. Firstly, these frameworks offer insights into how the challenges of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood, often marked by racialised and gendered oppression, serve as catalysts for creative entrepreneurship. Morgan's (1999) emphasis on the tension between empowerment and marginalisation highlights how Black women, particularly those in creative fields, use these tensions as opportunities to assert control over their identities and destinies. This analysis critically explores how these experiences of oppression are not merely obstacles but are, in many cases, the very catalysts that drive Black women toward entrepreneurship as a means of reclaiming identity and asserting agency.

Secondly, Bowen's (2021) contribution through trap feminism underscores how Black women navigate and attain positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment within their socio-political environments. For BFCEMs, particularly those from working-class or marginalised backgrounds, the negotiation of identity through subversive aesthetics and alternative forms of femininity becomes a key site of empowerment. This thesis demonstrates how BFCEMs exist within these frameworks, navigating systemic barriers, particularly in transatlantic spaces where heritage and creativity intersect.

Finally, the influence of Hip Hop on Black girls, women, and creative entrepreneurs is not just cultural, but deeply political. Hip Hop feminism reveals how this genre has redefined and re-imagined Black femininity and entrepreneurship. Morgan (1999) and Bowen (2021) both argue that Hip Hop's narratives empower Black women to redefine their roles. This thesis demonstrates how Hip Hop enabled me as the central BFCEM to demonstrate resistance

and agency, stories, struggles, and triumphs, reshaping my roles and opportunities within the creative industries and beyond.

Ethnomusicology is employed as a multi-sensory embodied method used as a dimension of survival, empowerment, and identity formation to explore how BFCEMs subvert dominant narratives and creates new, affirming representations through its creative and entrepreneurial practices. This is particularly important when considering the ethnomusicology chapter "*Rhythms of Resistance*" and the music playlist signposted throughout the thesis. Hip Hop feminism/trap feminism is critical at the junctures when challenging and deconstructing stereotypes often associated with Black girls, women, and mothers, both in the media and within Hip Hop itself as well as recognising it as a platform for intergenerational entrepreneurship, resistance, self-expression, creative practice and empowerment, which is well established in the literature.

These theoretical frameworks are also employed as a lens to examine the socio-economic and political landscapes of Birmingham, England (UK) and New York City (USA), in a comparative context which evolves throughout the wider thesis noting the legacy of colonialism, cultural vitality and questioning how the racial dynamics of British society contribute to unique challenges and opportunities for Black communities. Conversely, in New York, the historical and ongoing impact of systemic racism, alongside the vibrant cultural milieu, shapes a distinct set of experiences and strategies for navigating social spaces. By juxtaposing these contexts, chapters including *The Last Dance*, *Mother-Hood*, *X3I* and "*My Own Muse*" provide a comprehensive reflection of how international cultural and physical environments influence Black female identity formation and empowerment. While the photo-ethnography and "*I Am My Father's Daughter*" chapter highlight Racism and Anti-Blackness from a legacy of colonialism in Britain.

This thesis establishes a critical discourse that illuminates the complex interplay between local and global forces shaping Black women's lives. Through embodied methodological choices, it situates personal narrative within broader socio-political contexts, advancing our understanding of Black female maturation as multifaceted, intersectional, and transnational.

The significance of TDBFE lies in its ability to synthesise multiple feminist thoughts, including Black Feminist Thought, Womanism, Intersectionality, Hip Hop Feminism, and Trap Feminism, while addressing gaps in scholarship on the intersecting trajectories of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood. By positioning my own autoethnographic narrative within these frameworks, this research offers nuanced insights into how Black female identity, empowerment, and resilience are continuously forged and re-forged at the nexus of local realities and global dynamics.

TDBFE functions as both a framework and an analytic tool, uniquely equipped to interrogate the systemic, cultural, and political challenges facing BFCEMs. By centring lived experience, resilience, and creative entrepreneurship, this approach challenges homogenising narratives and fosters a more nuanced, representative discourse, one that is responsive to the realities of Black women across transatlantic contexts.

Reclaiming Voice and Power: 'Talking Back' as a Framework for Black Feminist Epistemology and Empowerment

At the core of this thesis, there is a conviction and commitment to “the importance of Black women telling their own stories” (Bobo, 2001, p. xvii) so that our words and experiences become powerful and authoritative.

In taking this approach this thesis leans toward, bell hooks’ seminal work *Talking Back, Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (2015), where she expounds upon the concept of "talking back," attributing it to the act of asserting one's voice and narrative in the face of authority. She contends that such an approach entails not only the courage to dissent but also the willingness to articulate one's own lived experiences and multiple identities. However, hooks also illuminates the stark reality that for Black girls, Black women, and Black mothers, "talking back" outside of the home in wider society was also met with resistance and condemnation, rather than validation and respect. Indeed, it has historically been construed as an act of defiance, leading to punitive measures, adultification, and the erasure of Black female perspectives.

“That was born in me the craving to speak, to have a voice, and not just any voice but one that could be identified as belonging to me. To make my voice, I had to speak, to hear myself talk, and talk I did, darting in and out of grown folks’ conversations and dialogues, answering questions that were not directed at me, endlessly asking questions, making speeches. Needless to say, the punishments for these acts of speech seemed endless. They were intended to silence me.”

b, hooks (2015), pg 6

In response, I assert that adopting a "talking back" approach offers a pathway towards nuanced understanding, intervention, and visibility for Black girls, Black women, and Black mothers by engaging in dialogues that challenge hegemonic narratives and amplify Black female voices. This pathway allows scholars, practitioners, and professionals the opportunity to foster a more inclusive discourse within academic fields such as Black Woman Studies, Black Girl Studies, and Black Motherhood Studies. Moreover, this approach intersects with

broader inquiries in Gender Studies, Race Studies, Ecologies and Age Studies, thereby enriching our understanding of intersecting identities and power dynamics.

Furthermore, the implications extend beyond academia, influencing popular culture/media, policy formulation, recalibration of institutional orientations and research agendas across various domains, including but not limited to wellness, mental health, education, creative industries, preserving/developing contemporary archives history as well as market research. By centring the narratives and experiences of Black women, girls and mothers, practitioners, changemakers and policymakers can develop more equitable and responsive interventions that address systemic inequities and promote holistic well-being.

In essence, the "talking back" approach advocated by hooks serves as a means of resistance and a catalyst for transformative change. By interrogating dominant discourses and amplifying Black female voices, we can pave the way for a more just and inclusive society that values the lived experiences and agency of all its members, regardless of race, gender, age, or social status. By centring Black women as knowledge producers and decision-makers within our own narratives, I am able to shift the locus of power from external authorities to us as Black women. Thereby fostering a paradigm where Black women not only reclaim their voices but also exercise autonomy in shaping the terms of our engagement with both academic and societal structures, ultimately redefining the contours of power and self-determination in spaces historically built to marginalise us. While also responding to how BFCEMs identities and strategies are developed for survival and thriving across intergenerational and transnational contexts, thus answering key questions about how autonomy, entrepreneurship, and motherhood intersect within Black feminist epistemology.

This "talking back" approach reinforces BFCEMs voices as powerful counter-narratives to systemic erasure, challenging dominant discourses and highlighting Black female agency. By amplifying the voices of Black girls, women, and mothers, this approach directly addresses research questions on navigating autonomy, upward mobility, and empowerment, within transatlantic socio-political contexts while emphasising identity formation and creative entrepreneurship.

Voicing Resistance and Reclaiming Power

A sensory and autoethnographic approach is employed in this thesis to critically examine the intricate intersections and lived realities of BFCEMs. Through embodied methodologies such as photo ethnography, Autoethnography, reflexivity, and ethnomusicology, the thesis

foregrounds the multi-layered journeys of myself as a BFCEMs in the pursuit of power, positionality, and upward mobility, navigating intersecting systems of oppression and resistance. These methodologies illuminate the often overlooked narratives of Black women, whose creative and entrepreneurial practices are not only acts of survival but also serve as radical forms of resistance and self-determination within a socio-cultural context marked by anti-Blackness, misogynoir, and systemic exclusion.

Autoethnography is the central methodology in this thesis, as it combines self-consciousness with cultural critique, blurring the boundaries between personal experiences and larger societal dynamics (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This approach resonates with Adams and Jones (2020), who assert that autoethnography enables researchers to "inhabit the personal as political" while confronting "structural inequalities that shape experiences." By placing my lived experiences in Birmingham, England, and New York City, USA, in conversation with Black feminist theorists and practitioners such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Aria Halliday, and Ruth Nicole Brown, this research critiques historical misrepresentations of Black female maturation. As Adams and Jones argue, autoethnography can "give voice to marginalised lives" and foster dialogue between self and society, a process that is critical in deconstructing dominant narratives and reclaiming space for Black women to represent themselves on our own terms.

The reflexive engagement within this research offers a counter-narrative to the hegemonic portrayals of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood, which have often been characterised by adultification, hyper sexualisation, and disposability. Boylorn and Orbe (2021) highlight how autoethnography, particularly for Black women, "becomes a tool of both critique and survival," as it enables the articulation of experiences that defy the stereotypes and reductive categories imposed by white supremacist and patriarchal structures. In this way, BFCEMs not only resist these harmful narratives but also assert our agency in defining our own identities and roles in society.

Addressing the underrepresentation of Black women's voices in discourses surrounding maturation through autoethnography creates a critical opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced body of knowledge. This aligns Collins (2000) argument that Black women's lived experiences offer a distinct standpoint from which to challenge dominant ideologies and systems of knowledge production, and in doing so, foster a more comprehensive understanding of the intersections of race, class, gender, and entrepreneurship. Boylorn and Orbe (2021) further emphasise that Black women's autoethnographic accounts "offer rich, culturally grounded insights into the ways in which

Black women live, resist, and create community," making our voices indispensable for reshaping dominant epistemologies.

By engaging deeply with contemporary literature on autoethnography as a decolonial methodology (Adams & Jones, 2020; Boylorn & Orbe, 2021), this thesis also critiques neoliberal pressures that commodify creative labour and impose hyper-competitive individualism. Neoliberalism often positions entrepreneurship as a tool of empowerment while simultaneously perpetuating economic precarity and systemic disenfranchisement, particularly for marginalised groups. BFCEMs, through our creative and entrepreneurial practices, attempt to resist these neoliberal imperatives by reclaiming our labour as a means of community building, self-expression, and intergenerational wealth creation. Therefore, entrepreneurship is not merely transactional but transformative, as it challenges the systemic barriers to economic mobility while fostering holistic well-being and cultural preservation.

In this context, the creative entrepreneurship of BFCEMs becomes a form of resistance against systemic disenfranchisement, including limited access to capital, discriminatory business practices, and exclusion from traditional labour markets. Our endeavours disrupt the exploitative models of labour that devalue Black women's contributions, asserting instead a model of entrepreneurship that centres community care, cultural sustainability, and personal agency. As Adams and Jones (2020) note, autoethnography is "an act of resistance against the structures that silence marginalised voices," and in this thesis, the personal stories of myself as a BFCEM have been positioned as a powerful counter-narrative that challenges systemic oppression.

Ultimately, by leveraging autoethnography as a politically engaged and transformative methodology, this thesis seeks to amplify the personal, cultural, and social realities of the BFCEMs. It not only illuminates individual and collective struggles and triumphs but also elevates contributions to reshaping societal understandings of Black girlhood, womanhood, motherhood, and entrepreneurship. Through this work, the research provides a richer, more nuanced perspective that is essential for developing equitable frameworks within academic scholarship and broader socio-political discourses.

Mirza (1997) notes, that the marginalisation of Black girls, women and mothers is not simply an issue of invisibility but one of active silencing within systems that fail to recognise their voices as valid sources of knowledge. Halliday (2016) underscores this point by highlighting how the adultification of Black girls contributes to their exclusion from conversations about girlhood, often leading to their premature treatment as adults. This process perpetuates a cycle of marginalisation, whereby Black girls are denied the childhood experience afforded to their white counterparts, a phenomenon that significantly shapes their journey into

womanhood and motherhood. By relegating Black girlhood to the periphery, scholars and researchers have inadvertently upheld a system that devalues their lived experiences, thus hindering comprehensive investigations into their transformation and development.

The critical challenges encountered during Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood, such as adultification, systemic oppression, and socio-economic barriers, have often served as catalysts for engaging in creative entrepreneurship. Collins (2000) emphasises that the struggle for self-definition and autonomy, particularly in environments that seek to marginalise, has led many Black women to create alternative spaces where they can assert control over their identities and economic futures, in this case towards creativity and entrepreneurship. This thesis will build on Collins' notion of "safe spaces," showing how Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers navigate and attain positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment within socio-political contexts that are often hostile to their success. For instance, Mirza (2017) also argues that Black women have historically used entrepreneurship not merely as a survival strategy but as a means of resistance against systemic inequalities, redefining their roles within both familial and broader societal frameworks.

Hip Hop culture plays a crucial role in the re-imagination and redefinition of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood, offering a space where Black women negotiate and assert their identities amidst intersecting systems of oppression. Joan Morgan's concept of Hip Hop feminism (1999) provides a critical framework for understanding how Black women engage with Hip Hop as a site of both empowerment and resistance. Morgan argues that Hip Hop feminism "demands that we simultaneously hold in tension both the brilliant and the problematic," reflecting the complexities of Black women's experiences within the culture. This duality highlights the ways in which Black women navigate a space that, while often marked by hypermasculinity and patriarchy, also serves as a powerful platform for their creative expression and social commentary (Morgan, 1999).

In recent years, the concept of Trap feminism has further expanded upon these ideas, particularly by examining how Black women's engagement with Hip Hop subgenres like Trap reflects their resistance to neoliberal pressures, economic disenfranchisement, and gendered exploitation. Brittney C. Cooper and Sesali Bowen argue that Trap feminism centres on "Black women's survival, hustle, and pursuit of freedom within the constraints of systemic oppression" (Bowen, 2021). This aligns with the epistemological production within Hip Hop culture that offers Black women a means of "reclaiming autonomy over their bodies, labour, and narratives," as Cooper (2017) points out. Hip Hop, in this sense, becomes a

space where Black women can reimagine not only their roles as creators and entrepreneurs but also as mothers, community leaders, and cultural producers.

By utilising autoethnography and ethnomusicology as embodied methodologies, this thesis explores how BFCEMs use Hip Hop culture to reframe and resist dominant narratives of Black womanhood. Revealing how Hip Hop culture offers a counter-narrative to the oppressive ideologies that often position Black women as objects of consumption rather than agents of change. For example, the lyrics of artists like Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B exemplify how Black women in Hip Hop resist respectability politics while asserting their sexual agency, financial independence, and creative prowess. This resistance to traditional gender roles and economic disenfranchisement challenges both patriarchal norms and neoliberal capitalist frameworks that devalue Black women's labour (McMillan Cottom, 2019).

Moreover, this research examines how the entrepreneurial aspect of Hip Hop allows Black women to navigate spaces of exclusion and create alternative economies that centre Black creativity and advancement. The rise of Black women-owned businesses in the fashion, beauty, and media industries, often linked to Hip Hop aesthetics, demonstrates how Black women leverage the cultural capital of Hip Hop to attain economic mobility and social influence. As Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) notes, Hip Hop is not only a cultural movement but "a platform for Black girls and women to articulate their lived realities, negotiate identities, and build collective futures."

This thesis critically examines how the historical underrepresentation of Black women's voices in academia, particularly regarding the maturation of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood, has limited their visibility and empowerment. Hip Hop culture, as a form of epistemological production, resists these silences by foregrounding Black women's narratives, offering them a platform to express their autonomy and agency in shaping their own stories. This approach is essential in addressing the gaps in knowledge surrounding Black women's contributions to creative industries, entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation, as Hip Hop continues to evolve as a space where Black women can assert their voices against systemic erasure.

Ultimately, through autoethnographic methods, this thesis amplifies the voices of Black women within Hip Hop, contributing to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to challenge the systemic inequalities they face. By situating Black women's narratives at the centre of the discussion, the research not only fills these critical gaps but also offers new perspectives on how Black women use creative entrepreneurship and Hip Hop culture as tools for social mobility, empowerment, and resistance to systemic disenfranchisement.

Employing the conceptual framework of TDBFE directly addresses the dismissal of Black women's knowledge by reclaiming and centring their voices, particularly the narratives of Black girls, women, and mothers, in both academic and cultural discourses. Historically, this exclusion has perpetuated a cycle of marginalisation, leaving space for stereotypes and misconceptions to shape the dominant narratives surrounding Black female experiences. Drawing on key intellectual contributions from Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), Womanism (Walker, 1983), and Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 1999), TDBFE challenges these representations by foregrounding the lived realities of Black women within transatlantic spaces. This approach not only reclaims authentic narratives but also illuminates how BFCEM navigate and attain upward mobility and positionality in socio-political environments that are often hostile to their empowerment. Through this lens, this thesis addresses the research questions by exploring how the critical challenges of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood serve as catalysts for creative entrepreneurship and how Hip Hop culture influences Black female entrepreneurs in re-imagining and redefining their roles. Ultimately, TDBFE provides the critical framework through which this thesis seeks to deconstruct exclusionary narratives and amplify Black women's contributions in shaping their economic and cultural futures.

The absence of Black women as authoritative voices in positions of power and culture creates a significant gap in the comprehensive understanding of both historical and contemporary society from the Black woman's standpoint, echoing Collins' (2000) assertion that Black women's lived experiences are systematically excluded from mainstream discourses. This exclusion, as emphasised by Bailey (2021) in her work on misogynoir, reinforces harmful stereotypes and marginalises Black women in ways that perpetuate systemic inequalities across social, political, and economic domains. Furthermore, Carby (1997) critiques the erasure of Black women from historical narratives, arguing that their exclusion from leadership positions and cultural production limits the range of voices that shape knowledge and policy. This erasure is particularly evident in contemporary media and popular culture, where hooks (2015) has argued that Black women are subjected to misrepresentation, reducing them to one-dimensional roles. Steele (2022) builds on this by illustrating how digital platforms offer new opportunities for Black women to assert their authority and resist these misrepresentations, but notes that the structural barriers persist. These scholars underscore how the lack of Black women in positions of authority not only distorts societal understandings of Black womanhood but also limits their capacity to influence the power structures that shape their lives.

This thesis, through the lens of TDBFE, directly addresses this gap by centring the voices and experiences of BFCEMs and offering new perspectives on their socio-political mobility

and positionality. By engaging with these foundational and contemporary theories, the thesis explores how Black women's creative entrepreneurship serves as a critical space for reclaiming authority, challenging stereotypes, and generating economic empowerment. Through autoethnography, the research fills crucial gaps in understanding how Black women navigate cultural and systemic barriers to reshape representations and lived realities across transatlantic spaces.

As a result, there is a sense of urgency to recognise that Black girls, Black Women and Black mothers must be given the space, freedom, and power to share their very specific voices and diverse images and experiences in academia, and wider society, therefore contributing to Black womanhood studies, Black girl studies, gender studies and intersectionality.

Sara Ahmed (2021) calls for a re-evaluation of historical archives within Black feminist discourse, arguing that the systemic dismissal and devaluation of Black women's voices have led to their marginalisation as mere "complaints." This thesis directly responds to Ahmed's critique by employing qualitative methodologies, specifically, autoethnography, photo-ethnography, and ethnomusicology, to foreground the nuanced perspectives of Black women, girls, and mothers. These methodologies allow for a deep engagement with the personal narrative of myself as a BFCEM, challenging the prevailing narratives that have historically silenced and undermined their experiences. Autoethnography, in particular, is used to weave together personal experiences with wider socio-political structures, creating an intimate yet critical space to document how identity is shaped and reshaped throughout Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood. By focusing on sensory and embodied knowledge through photo-ethnography, the thesis visualises the intersections of race, gender, and class, family, and love offering a layered examination of how Black women navigate systemic barriers (Crenshaw, 1990).

Ethnomusicology is also a critical methodology in this research, particularly in exploring how Hip Hop culture influences Black girls and women's maturation and entrepreneurial journeys. This aligns with the work of scholars such as Jacobs (2016) and Love (2012), who highlight the role of music and cultural production in shaping Black identity and community. Through these methodologies, this thesis not only amplifies the voices of Black women but also actively deconstructs the dominant narratives that have misrepresented them at each stage of maturation, from Black girlhood to motherhood. The intersectional approach allows the research to critically assess how these formative stages, shaped by racialised and gendered experiences, serve as catalysts for creative entrepreneurship, providing a holistic framework

for understanding the socio-political contexts that shape the lived realities of Black women across transatlantic spaces.

This sensory, autoethnographic approach foregrounds Black women's lived experiences and multi-layered identities, reclaiming narratives and addressing intersectional challenges that catalyse BFCEMs engagement in creative entrepreneurship, autonomy, and empowerment. Employing this methodology, including photo-ethnography and ethnomusicology, aligns with the overarching TDBFE to amplify Black women's agency within systemic, socio-cultural contexts.

Black Feminist Epistemology and Praxis

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you”

Maya Angelou (1969). Pg 186

Western structures of knowledge validation fundamentally shape traditional scholarship, enforcing hegemonic norms rooted in white male dominance, patriarchy, and misogyny. These paradigms perpetuate racist ideologies that confine Black women's identities and possibilities, casting them as subjects of white supremacy (Halliday, 2022). Black feminist thought leaders including Patricia Hill Collins (2000), bell hooks (1981), Audre Lorde (1984), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Angela Davis (1981), and Moya Bailey (2021), have long exposed how these structures systematically marginalise, silence, and distort Black women's voices, reproducing intersecting regimes of racial and gendered oppression.

Addressing these epistemic gaps is not an academic luxury but an urgent necessity. Transforming knowledge production requires critical engagement that centres the complexity and diversity of Black women's lives. Only by challenging and expanding dominant paradigms can scholarship begin to reflect the realities of Black women and dismantle the systemic inequalities embedded within traditional academic frameworks.

Smith and Tuhiwai (1999) argue that every aspect of knowledge production influences how Indigenous ways of knowing are represented. Similarly, this highlights the importance of context and agency in the articulation and preservation of Black women's knowledge systems. While Black women's epistemologies share a decolonising impetus with Indigenous women's methodologies, they remain distinct, shaped by their unique historical, cultural, and social experiences. Representation is crucial because it gives the impression of 'the truth'. This argument is significant in asserting that every aspect of producing knowledge

influences how Black womanhood and maturation is understood, represented, and preserved. Despite this, Black women have long produced knowledge and operated through alternative mediums as activists and scholars, advocating for equality, justice, and self-expression. Figures such as Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Zora Neale Hurston, Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Kimberley Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins have transformed and reimagined how Black female experiences are captured and disseminated.

Contemporary leaders of Black feminist thought have begun to rigorously reimagine both contemporary constructs and Black feminist epistemology, expanding the application of intersectionality to examine the complexities of Black family, Black motherhood, and activism across social, political, cultural, and economic spheres. Akwugo Emejulu (2017) underscores the necessity for a transformative Black feminist praxis that not only recognises but actively addresses the material conditions of Black women across geographies and socio-political contexts. She argues that while Black women's activism is often marginalised, it remains vital in challenging the socio-economic inequalities perpetuated by neoliberal regimes. Similarly, scholars like Tina Campt (2017) and Christina Sharpe (2016) extend Black feminist thought by exploring how Black women negotiate survival and power within contexts of anti-Blackness and systemic erasure. Campt's listening to images and Sharpe's concept of "wake work" offers critical insights into how Black women's everyday acts of resistance, whether through cultural production or sensory practices, challenge oppressive structures and reimagine Black womanhood, family, and community.

Despite these theoretical expansions, Black women continue to face persistent institutional and systemic barriers that limit their access to decision-making roles and positions of authority, thereby stifling their influence in shaping both public policy and feminist discourse. This lack of representation not only devalues their diverse experiences but also constrains the development of Black feminist knowledge production. Emejulu (2017) further critiques the exclusion of Black women from leadership roles within Black feminist spaces, demonstrating how this marginalisation sustains a cycle of exclusion that reinforces white feminist hegemony. Scholars such as Bryan et al. (1985), Osler (1989), and Mirza (1992, 2008) have made significant contributions by exploring the experiences of Black British women, however, their analyses often treat gender and race as separate, rather than deeply interconnected, systems of oppression. Hazel Carby (1997) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) have countered this by advocating for a more nuanced and integrated understanding of race, gender, and class, which more accurately reflects the lived experiences of Black women.

By weaving together these contemporary theoretical perspectives, this thesis addresses significant limitations in the existing literature, advancing the conversation on the interconnectedness of Black womanhood, girlhood, and family. It challenges the systemic barriers that continue to marginalise Black women in academia, cultural institutions, and public discourse. This research employs methodologies such as autoethnography, photo-ethnography, and ethnomusicology to not only document Black women's lived experiences but also position their creative and cultural practices as essential forms of resistance. These embodied and creative practices disrupt dominant ideologies, offering new spaces for self-definition, agency, and empowerment. By pushing the boundaries of traditional Black feminist thought, this thesis advocates for a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach that recognises the dynamism and complexity of Black women's lived realities.

In focusing on creative and sensory methodologies, this thesis contributes to the reimagining of Black feminist knowledge production by challenging institutional exclusions and expanding theoretical frameworks. It demonstrates that everyday acts of survival, creativity, and cultural production are not peripheral to Black women's resistance but central to it. Through these practices, Black women continually reimagine their roles as creators, activists, and entrepreneurs, confronting systemic challenges while asserting their agency in both personal and public spheres.

By weaving together Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality, and the transatlantic dimensions of Black women's experiences, this thesis fills significant gaps in existing literature. It offers new insights into how Black women reclaim agency and redefine their roles in both personal and public domains, particularly in transatlantic contexts where the legacy of diaspora plays a central role in shaping their identities. Ultimately, the research reinforces the centrality of Black women's voices in knowledge production, challenging systemic erasures and asserting their place as authoritative voices in academic and cultural discourses.

Implementing this allows the thesis to respond to key questions by examining how critical challenges, such as adultification, systemic racism, and socio-economic marginalisation, serve as catalysts for Black girls, women, and mothers to engage in creative entrepreneurship. By integrating TDBFE with methodologies such as autoethnography and photo-ethnography, this thesis delves into how BFCEMs navigate socio-political barriers while seeking empowerment and upward mobility in hostile environments. Additionally, the influence of Hip Hop culture is critically explored, assessing its role in shaping the identities and entrepreneurial practices of Black girls, women, and mothers. Hip Hop feminism is particularly valuable in analysing how Black women re-imagine and redefine their roles as

creative entrepreneurs within a cultural landscape that both marginalises and empowers them.

Feminist Epistemology and Its Limitations

Feminist epistemology seeks to understand how gender influences our conceptions of knowledge, knowers, and practices of inquiry and justification (Elizabeth, 2020). However, this approach has often fallen short of addressing the unique oppressions faced by Black women.

Previously, the dominant lens of white women within feminist epistemology has failed to fully capture the experiences of Black women, thereby perpetuating another iteration of racism. This oversight neglects the concept of "double jeopardy," where race and gender collectively and individually impact the experiences of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Buchanan et al., 2009; Chaney et al., 2021; Remedios & Snyder, 2018) while navigating the wider social constructs of Western society.

The limitations in epistemological choices concerning Black women as thought leaders within Western knowledge structures raise concerns about which versions of truth will prevail regarding what we believe and who we believe. Regarding Black women as thought leaders within Western knowledge validation structures, when considering expertise, epistemic responsibility, and trustworthiness (Elizabeth, 2020). Questions arise about how truth is redefined in praxis to illuminate intersectional experiences. (Gregory, 2023) and how such truth shapes the future positionality and power of not only Black women but the wider Black community. I assert that this thesis contributes to challenging dominant Western knowledge structures by advocating for greater epistemic responsibility in acknowledging Black women's lived experiences. Reimagining truth through the lens of BFCEMs experiences not only shifts the dynamics of positionality and power but also disrupts entrenched hierarchies of knowledge by providing nuanced embodied insights that are often overlooked. This shift is crucial, as it redefines the contours of expertise and trustworthiness, while also addressing the broader impact on the Black community and collective empowerment, arguing that the future of knowledge creation hinges on centring these diverse and intersectional truths to dismantle exclusionary practices.

Black Feminist Epistemology and Praxis provide a critical framework for examining the entrepreneurial journey of a Black British Jamaican heritage, educated, single mother and creative navigating the intersecting social, political, economic, and cultural landscapes of England and the USA. This analysis addresses the triple oppression of race, gender, and

class (Jones, 1949), while exploring the maturation of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood through sensory and autoethnographic methods. Ibrahim's (2021) concept of Black age further enriches this exploration by offering a nuanced understanding of these transitions and the complexities of Black British female experiences across these life stages.

In response to Habiba Ibrahim's work on Black Age and its implications for normative human experience and development, this thesis employs Black Feminist Epistemology to explore Black female maturation from girlhood to womanhood, to motherhood. Ibrahim's concept of Black Age as a prism through which to understand both the abuses of liberal humanist dispossession and the reclamation of Black cultural, political, and historical identity.

I employ Habiba Ibrahim's concept of "*Black Age*" to critically examine how BFCEMs are systematically denied full participation in normative developmental stages such as girlhood, womanhood and motherhood due to systemic racism, gender oppression, and historical dispossession. Black Age offers a framework through which Black identity, history, and culture can be reclaimed and asserted beyond these restrictive constructs. By applying Black Feminist Epistemology, through the use of the TDBFE this thesis explores the maturation of Black females, from girlhood to womanhood, and ultimately to motherhood, through the lens of Black Age.

Ibrahim's concept serves as a theoretical tool for understanding how racialised, gendered, and class-based oppressions shape Black women's developmental experiences. The thesis draws on this framework to explore how BFCEMs navigate societal structures that traditionally marginalise and limit their growth while reclaiming their cultural and historical identities. This reclamation is not merely an act of resistance but involves the creation of new, empowering spaces for growth, maturity, and identity formation grounded in Black feminist thought.

By aligning the TDBFE alongside the concept of the Black Age, the thesis illuminates the specific challenges Black women face in navigating these developmental stages. It highlights how they actively redefine these life phases in ways that affirm their intersectional identities and lived experiences. This approach deepens our understanding of how Black women thrive despite oppressive systems and challenges normative assumptions about human development, broadening the discourse on growth, identity, and empowerment within Black communities.

Building upon Ibrahim's insights, this thesis addresses critical gaps in Age Studies, Black Girlhood Studies, and Black Womanhood Studies, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Black British females' experiences. This thesis challenges the prevailing narrative that emphasises the "impossibility of Blackness" and the struggles associated with

an "unimaginable childhood" for Black girls, women, and mothers striving for success in Britain. Instead, it highlights the resilience, agency, and empowerment inherent in their journeys.

The following autoethnographic chapters illustrate instances of "Black pride" and the nurturing, loving childhoods that Black girls and women can experience, even amidst systemic barriers and challenges. By showcasing the supportive roles of family, community, and spirituality, this research demonstrates how these elements serve as forms of resistance, sources of inspiration, and tools of empowerment. This thesis thus offers a transformative perspective, emphasising the potential for thriving Black identities within the context of adverse social conditions, and enriching the discourse in Black Age Studies, Black Womanhood Studies, and Black Girlhood Studies.

Marginalisation and Invisibility of Black Women

The intersection of race and gender as dual disadvantaged social categories (The Combahee River Collective, 1977/2014; Crenshaw, 1991) continues to render Black women invisible, further marginalising their narratives within traditional knowledge structures. This invisibility skews the representation of Black women's identities, struggles, and contributions. As a result, the insights, thoughts, and voices of Black women's lived experiences are routinely silenced, excluded, distorted, and undervalued in knowledge-making and preservation. This profoundly impacts their visibility in both historical and contemporary contributions to knowledge production and praxis.

The invisibility of Black women continues into the systematic oppression they face in academia which is evident in their absence and underrepresentation as research participants, knowledge producers, and contributors (Mowatt, Rasul & French, 2013). The invisibility of Black British women is attributed by Mirza (1997) to the separate narrative constructions of race, gender, and class. The separate narrative constructions of race, gender, and class create fragmented understandings that overlook the intersecting realities of Black women, leaving their experiences marginalised and unexamined, which reinforces systemic barriers to power, positionality, and social mobility.

Institutional and Systemic Challenges

Despite Black women's multidisciplinary contributions, institutional and systemic challenges persist, denying them positions of authority and limiting the value of their diverse voices and

experiences. Previous research on Black British women (Bryan et al., 1985; Osler, 1989; Mirza, 1992, 2008; Gabriel, 2016) has often been limited to gendered and raced identities as separate axes rather than seeing them as inextricably connected (Carby, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Due to systemic suppressions and limitations, the validity and representation of Black women as knowledge producers have been neglected. This has pushed them to the periphery of traditional scholarship, leaving them with no choice but to construct a Black feminist consciousness that incorporates Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). These frameworks provide meaning to lived experiences and offer Black women a language to understand and explain the complex and multi-layered makeup of the Black female experience.

Black feminist thought challenges traditional White, Eurocentric social constructions of knowledge (Collins, 2000), dismantling entrenched systems of power and privilege that perpetuate the erasure of Black women within academic and social spheres. This thesis centres on Black women's ways of knowing, offering a holistic and truthful representation of human experiences. By applying TDBFE, this work provides an intersectional, intergenerational, and multidisciplinary perspective, contributing to a contemporary archive of more just, inclusive, and accurate knowledge systems that reflect the multifaceted realities of Black women's lives.

Detailed academic and social research on Black girls, women, and mothers, particularly Black Jamaican heritage women in Britain as creative entrepreneurs, is necessary to combat the invisibility of Black British women's experiences and contributions. Continued and innovative knowledge production by underrepresented groups will produce nuanced holistic insights, challenging existing knowledge and creating new understandings. This will empower marginalised people to become visible and assert their voices within traditional and contemporary scholarship (Kiwani, 2017; Doherty, 2019)

Redefining Black Girlhood: Intersectionality, Oppression, and the Transformative Role of Hip Hop in Shaping Identity

This section explores the intersectional identities, oppressions, and lived experiences of Black girls, highlighting the limitations within both feminism and Black feminist theory in fully capturing the nuances of Black girlhood (Smith, 2019). To date, Black feminism has been instrumental in resisting the multiple oppressions faced by Black women at the intersections

of race, gender, age, and class, creating spaces for self-naming and empowerment (Brown, 2009; Collins, 2000).

Ultimately, this research endeavours to offer new insights and foresight into the broader Black experience, enriching our understanding of the multifaceted journey from maturation to womanhood within Black communities.

Within this critical void, this thesis generates knowledge that illuminates the uncertainty Black girls experience when navigating oppressive environments, where they are often reduced to essentialised categories based on perceived physical, intellectual, or bodily characteristics (Hall, 1996). Such environments frequently label Black girls as loud, aggressive, angry, and inherently problematic (Halliday, 2019). This dynamic reflects broader historical patterns of marginalisation and disenfranchisement deeply embedded in societal structures and perpetuated through educational practices (Nunn, 2018).

The data collected and knowledge produced from the lived experiences of Black girls, demonstrated in the autoethnographic elements of this thesis, particularly in secondary and higher education, underscore the persistence of both implicit and explicit discrimination (Fordham, 1993; Koonce, 2012; Tonnesen, 2013; Wilkins, 2013). This discrimination complicates their already challenging struggle to make sense of their identities as Black girls (Halliday, 2019), further limiting their ability to feel accepted, empowered, and able to present themselves fully. April-Louise Pennant's work further explores how these intersecting oppressions affect Black girls' academic outcomes and personal development, emphasising the urgent need for systemic change that fosters both intellectual growth and holistic well-being.

This entirety is where an understanding of Black Girlhood experiences of social stressors relevant to the double jeopardy of racism and sexism, alongside class and age is required. While acknowledging the catalysts of strength, perseverance, and independence that emerge from these hostile environments and oppressive experiences, somehow in Black Girlhood, a means is found to transform these struggles into contributors of improved self-esteem, survival, and ambition. This is important when considering the wider research and how I conceptualise the creative entrepreneurial journey through the maturation of Black womanhood, Black girlhood, and Black motherhood. It is the intricacy and nuances of how Black girls inform the knowledge production of self and aspiration that becomes significant in the overall journey towards becoming a Black female creative entrepreneur.

In the exploration of Black girls' negotiation of identity through childhood amidst structures and agencies marked by hostility and inequality, Brown (2009) serves as a poignant reminder that they are not free from injustice and inequality. As such, this thesis integrates

elements of autoethnography to delve into the intersectional experiences and nuances when negotiating mobility, positionality, and belonging across institutions, including academia and employment. By employing this approach, the research sheds light on the inequalities, oppressions, challenges, and successes encountered by Black girls and Black women, factors that significantly shape their trajectories toward entrepreneurship and away from conventional working environments. The autoethnographic choices within the wider thesis offer insight into the intricate journey of Black girls and women navigating within systems marked by injustice and inequality, paving the way for a deeper understanding of their experiences and the pathways they forge towards entrepreneurship.

Black Feminist Theory and Its Limitations Concerning Black Girls

Black feminism has consistently emphasised that "the personal is political," addressing social, economic, political, and familial rights (Coleman, 2006; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981). The experiences of Black women and girls are inherently connected by race, gender, and class. However, previous iterations of feminism and Black feminism have minimised and undervalued the critical and political literacies of Black girls (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 2020; Morris, 2016). This oversight affects our understanding of Black girlhood perspectives and experiences therefore affecting how we come to know and understand Black girlhood perspectives, sensibilities, and experiences.

Currently, there is limited emphasis on Black girlhood in feminist and Black feminist literature. This thesis does not suggest that Black feminism, Black feminist epistemology, and praxis lack relevance to Black girlhood; rather, it argues for a broader scope that includes intersectionality encompassing gender, race, class, and age through the experiences of Black girls. This gap presents an opportunity to enrich Black girlhood studies by producing knowledge from the voices of Black girls, reflecting their complex and multifaceted experiences. from the Black girlhood standpoint. Thus, forming insights on the importance of power and autonomy, creating, developing, capturing, and preserving self-definitions, self-discovery, and empowerment (Brown 2009; Collins 2000) alongside exploration, identity formation, and becoming are formed while navigating wider social constructs, investigating deeper into the formative and supportive systems that contribute to the emotional, psychological, and physical make-up of Black girlhood.

Fourth-Wave Feminism and Black Girlhood

The fourth-wave feminist movement has gained momentum through transnational activism, resistance to misogyny and sexual violence, and new feminist thought (Strauss, 2023). In the identity construction of Black adolescent girls (Crenshaw, 1990; Jacobs, 2016; Love, 2012), their experiences are often analysed through Black feminist epistemology, which tends to perpetuate the adultification of Black girls (Smith, 2019). This adultification leaves Black girlhood unimagined and, worse, unimaginable (Halliday, 2016). Excluding Black girlhood creates a knowledge gap that necessitates further investigation into the transformation from girlhood to womanhood and motherhood. I assert that Black girlhood as a distinct and critical phase stands on its own, outside of the frameworks that often attempt to confine and simplify it. To ignore this as an autonomous phase, (Love, 2019) is in my opinion a missed opportunity, to actualise Love's concept of "abolitionist teaching" to challenge the systemic barriers that pathologise Black girls' behaviours, advocating for spaces where their identities are affirmed and their voices centred, further recognising Black girls as intellectuals, creators, and leaders, not through the lens of white normative girlhood, but through their unique experiences of resistance and resilience. Therefore, reducing harmful stereotypes that dismiss Black girls' complexity and brilliance, ultimately hindering their rightful position as knowledge bearers and contributors to society's broader intellectual and cultural fabric.

It is demonstrated in this thesis in the photo ethnography, and autoethnographic chapter, "*The Last Dance*" that Black girlhood is not merely an extension of Black womanhood or motherhood.

The Standpoint of Black Girlhood

Recognising Black girlhood as its own experience provides an opportunity to shed light on the complexities of Black womanhood and motherhood, especially in navigating social, political, economic, and cultural landscapes. This research explores how these experiences shape perspectives on education, employment, and other life trajectories leading to creative entrepreneurship. A focal point of this investigation is the pressing issues faced during Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood that function as catalysts for entrepreneurship, particularly in the creative sector.

Crenshaw (1989) suggests that intersectionality is not just about interlocking identities, but it is also about how those identities interlock with geopolitical locations that undergird the notion that places are created through laws, ordinances, unemployment, as well as racial

and class discrimination in the housing industry, education criminal justice, violence, exploitation, sexual abuse. This can inform the already familiar bleak, unforgiving, traumatic, and lonely narratives where Black girls often find themselves rejected (Brown 2009) while creating a newer and more holistic narrative of Black girlhood. Engaging in this exploration creatively and critically with the UK and USA specifically Birmingham UK and New York in the USA will result in an interdisciplinary and diasporic undertaking, one that honours multiple sites of inquiry McKittrick, K (2014),

Durham, (2007) has previously acknowledged similar limitations in this gap and calls out the continuous regurgitation of the Third wave model of Feminism that champions equality for women while still perpetuating the invisibility of Black bodies, lived experience, history, culture, and theorising. Fourth wave Black feminists stand firm in the belief that Black womanhood should be defended as it has been impugned repeatedly, stereotypes, and have been blamed for numerous social and political ills (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; King, 1977; Roberts, 1997; White, 1999).

Thinking about Sabrina Strings' germinal work, *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (2019), highlights how fatness has been racialised and stigmatised, particularly concerning Black women. Strings argues that the "fear of the Black body" was historically tied not only to race but also to size, casting Black female bodies as inherently deviant and reinforcing anti-Blackness in modern forms of sizeism (Strings, 2019, p. 6). In considering the impact of social and cultural issues on Black girls and women and specifically me as the BFCEMs central to this thesis, examining the intersections of sizeism, colourism, and heritage-based prejudices, which shaped my own lived experiences and positionality is significant in how I show up along the journey towards creative entrepreneurship and how it impacts my perception and experiences navigating power, positionality and mobility. This is demonstrated throughout the thesis but specifically in autoethnographic chapters "*The Last Dance*" and "*Let Me Tell You Where I Grew Up At!*" in relation to girlhood and identity formation, "Mother-Hood" in relation to societal perceptions and stereotypes, "*X3I*" and "*Muva Hustler*" in relation to femininity, womanhood and confidence and visibility.

Similarly, colourism functions as a divisive mechanism both within Black communities and externally, positioning lighter-skinned individuals closer to Eurocentric ideals while darker-skinned Black women are subjected to heightened marginalisation and stereotyping (Hunter, 2007). Strings' claim that "the Black body was pathologized" (Strings, 2019, p. 11) extends beyond body size to include skin tone, demonstrating how these dual oppressions continue to dehumanise Black women and affect their access, mobility, positionality, and ultimately

their power. Prejudices tied to heritage further complicate this dynamic, as colonial legacies have framed the cultural customs and values of Black women as inferior or othered (Cooper, 2017).

These dynamics are particularly pronounced in the context of Jamaican heritage women, as the intersection of post-colonial racial hierarchies and colourism exacerbate the marginalisation of darker-skinned women, who are often relegated to lower socioeconomic status and cultural invisibility. Studies by Charles (2020) and Robinson-Walcott (2018) illustrate how Jamaican women's bodies are continuously racialised and policed through these dual oppressions, reinforcing colonial ideas that seek to erase Jamaican cultural identity while elevating Eurocentric beauty and behavioural standards.

These intersecting oppressions, sizeism, colourism, and heritage-based prejudice, produce varied iterations of Blackness and complicate the experiences of Black girlhood, womanhood and motherhood and in turn BFCEMs. This complexity reframes Black women's lives as multifaceted, constantly navigating the societal boundaries of visibility, desirability, and belonging (Crenshaw, 1989).

In this thesis, the multidisciplinary methods explore the complexity that comes with mobility, success, power, economic growth, and accessibility as a darker-skinned, plus-sized Jamaican heritage girl to single mother and as a creative entrepreneur, bringing further understanding to intersectionality within the transformation of girlhood, womanhood, motherhood, and creative entrepreneurship journey, creating space for other academic, creative, advocate voices and knowledge production to exist in contemporary archives.

The importance of identity and value throughout Black girlhood/adolescence highlights challenges around the concept of love, and the impact of being loved or unloved from the broader social-political standpoint regarding visibility, acceptance, inclusion, and value. bell hooks' idea that to a child's mind, love was a good feeling when treated like you mattered, becoming confusing when you were punished for wrongdoings, and even more confusing when love was associated with the good feeling that came with getting your needs met. hooks, (2000) speaks to the disappointment and neglect that manifest when needs are not met, as well as the impact experienced by Black girls during the maturation of personal and professional development when they are continuously in environments where everything about them physically, socially, and emotionally is unloved.

These oppressive and hostile environments reflect spaces and places where Black girls are both excluded and included socially, politically, and economically based on the intersectionality of race, gender, age, and class. And when navigating this hostile landscape during Black girlhood, the ideals of love, discovery, expression, and freedom within girlhood

seem more like a Disney film than a reality, this is explored specifically in the autoethnographic chapter “*Muva Hustler*”.

Seldom does academia acknowledge the consistent pattern of rejection and empowerment that early adolescent Black girls experience in their identity development processes (Payne, 2022). This element of the thesis will contribute to responding to the direct research question “What systemic and socio-cultural challenges faced by Black girls, women, and mothers serve as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship”?

Hip Hop culture provides a crucial space for Black girls to explore their identities and find representation in powerful Black women who embody equity, opportunity, and independence. Ruth Nicole Brown, in her work “*Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*” (2013), emphasises Hip Hop culture as a transformative site for Black girls to express their unique experiences and resist oppressive narratives, offering them a platform where “Black girl brilliance” can be celebrated and nurtured (Brown, 2013, p. 28). This cultural space allows for the articulation of both individual and collective identities, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.

This cultural platform offers a form of empowerment that contrasts with the oppression, displacement, and invisibility they often experience in their geospatial contexts. bell hooks in “*Teaching to Transgress*” (1994) notes the oppressive nature of both home and school environments for Black girls, where they are forced to conform to external expectations and counter white racist assumptions. Collins (2000) highlights the invisibility of the Black working class within Black feminist thought, while Audre Lorde’s works, including “*Zami*,” further emphasise the intersection of class and Black girlhood experiences.

The Role of Hip-Hop Culture in Black Girlhood

Hip Hop culture offers a unique space for Black girls to explore identity, representation, and empowerment. However, it also presents challenges, such as hyper-sexualisation and colourism (Brown, 2009; Lindsey, 2013; Love, 2012; McArthur, 2016; Payne, 2020; Pough, 2004; Richardson, 2007). This thesis examines how Black girls navigate Hip Hop culture, using it as a platform for empowerment while grappling with its conflicts. Employing ethnomusicological methods, the research delves into how Hip Hop influences Black girls' identity formation and entrepreneurial aspirations, particularly in the context of beauty standards, sexual messaging, and resilience (Travis, 2013).

However, Hip-Hop's complicated relationships with Black girls reveal several representations of Black girls and women with some being hypersexualised while others reflect

empowerment (Brown 2009; Lindsey 2013; Love 2012; McArthur 2016; Payne 2020; Pough 2004; Richardson 2007). Navigating this landscape through Black girlhood, therefore, has become a prevalent space for Black girls to explore love, freedom, and resilience while forming an identity, but it has also been a space of conflict, colourism, sizeism, rejection and adultification for those same Black girls and women.

In this thesis, the negotiation of identity, representation, and value within the context of Black girlhood is meticulously examined through an exploration of the interconnectedness between Hip Hop culture and the construction of intersectionality. Drawing upon the works of Love (2012), Kelly (2016), McArthur (2016), and Richardson (2013), the utilisation of Hip Hop feminist literacies is employed to illustrate how Black girls are continuously influenced by the music and messaging of Hip Hop. Employing an ethnomusicological approach, this thesis delves into the symbiotic relationship between Black girls and Hip Hop, particularly in the (re)construction and (re)evaluation of beauty standards, sexual messaging, stereotypes, and the inherent challenges encountered in forming identities, as discussed by Love (2012). It is argued that for Black girlhood, Hip Hop culture serves as a platform for both individual and communal empowerment, facilitating discussions on self-esteem, self-image, resiliency, growth, maturity, community factors, and social justice, as underscored by Travis (2013). This is important to the third overarching question within this thesis that asks, what influence (if at all) does Hip Hop culture have on Black women's maturation? and how in turn it has been used to re-imagine and redefine the identity and mindset in the becoming of Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers.

Reclaiming Identity and Power: Black Motherhood, Hip Hop Culture, and Entrepreneurial Resilience

Black women's lived experiences reflect a tapestry woven with resilience, creativity, vitality, poise and resistance. Yet, they are continuously shaped by oppressive systems that seek to define them within the margins of society. Black women, particularly those who navigate the realms of motherhood and entrepreneurship, have long been burdened by societal expectations and the weight of harmful stereotypes. Despite these constraints, Black women have forged spaces of cultural and creative expression and expansion, exemplifying their capacity to strive and thrive in hostile environments where their humanity is constantly contested. Through the lens of Hip Hop culture, Black motherhood emerges not as a monolith, but as a site of powerful reclamation, creativity, and survival.

This thesis invites readers to explore the intricate mastery of BFCEMs, whose existence challenges the simplistic, negative narratives attached to Black female maturation through

girlhood, womanhood and motherhood. Instead, it embodies an expansive tradition of intergenerational entrepreneurship, all while navigating racial, gendered, and economic precarity. The intersections of music, fashion, and cultural production within Hip Hop provide a counter-narrative to these negative stereotypes, positioning BFCEMs as innovators and community builders who defy reductive, harmful tropes.

“If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crushed into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive.”

Audre Lorde – Sister Outsider (1984) p. 137

To advance knowledge in the field of Black women's/feminist studies, this thesis critically illuminates the complexities surrounding how Black womanhood is understood, explored, perceived, and shaped by external forces. Black women navigate SPEC and geographical landscapes, which intersect with multiple dimensions of their lived experiences, including motherhood, career aspirations, and family dynamics (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981; Tatum, 1997). These intersections are central to shaping attitudes, behaviours, and the multi-dimensionality of Black women's lives (Chancey, 2011). The heterogeneity of Black womanhood necessitates the creation of safe, evolving spaces where Black women can explore and affirm their cultural values and belief systems, which are far from monolithic (Collins, 2000; Cross, 1971; Evans et al., 2010). These spaces must not solely focus on familiar challenges such as covert racism but should also foster the understanding of nuanced identities and lived experiences (Solórzano, 2000; Thompson & Dey, 1998).

For centuries, Black motherhood has been defined by dehumanising stereotypes that diminish Black women’s roles. The "Mammy" figure, originating in plantation slavery, portrays Black women as nurturing, self-sacrificing, and subservient, often prioritising the care of white families at the expense of their own. In contrast, the "Welfare Queen" stereotype, which gained prominence in the late 20th century, depicts Black mothers as irresponsible and exploitative of welfare systems, reinforcing damaging societal perceptions (Roberts, 1997; Collins, 2000). However, these reductive stereotypes fail to account for the broader structural forces, such as austerity measures, the breakdown of Black families through mass incarceration, and financially punitive policies like the "man-in-the-house" rule, which disqualifies families from welfare benefits if a male figure is present, further marginalising Black mothers and limiting their access to resources (Wacquant, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Fearn, 2017). These systemic issues exacerbate the economic

vulnerability of Black women and families, often forcing them into precarious situations that the stereotypes fail to acknowledge. These enduring archetypes persist in contemporary media and public discourse, perpetuating the myth of the "unfit" Black mother while obscuring the complexities of systemic violence and economic exploitation that Black women endure. Understanding this history of stereotyping Black women contributes to responding to 1 of 3 research questions: what systemic and socio-cultural challenges faced by Black girls, women, and mothers serve as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship?

However, Hip Hop culture has played a transformative role in contesting these narratives. From its inception, Hip Hop has served as a platform for Black cultural expression, where Black women have actively resisted reductive and dehumanising portrayals. Hip Hop has provided counter-narratives emphasising the strength, vulnerability, and multi-dimensionality of Black womanhood and motherhood through the lyrical and cultural contributions of artists like Lauryn Hill and Queen Latifah. Beyond music, Black women within Hip Hop have leveraged the genre's reach to foster spaces of intergenerational wealth, cultural preservation, and community building, often pushing back against both external stereotypes and internalised misogyny (Rose, 1994; Morgan, 2015). Hip Hop, therefore, acts as a site of both affirmation and defiance, empowering Black mothers to reclaim their identities as resilient, creative, and self-determined agents of change.

Interwoven Struggles: Black Motherhood, Social Mobility, and Creative Entrepreneurship

Black motherhood in the UK, USA, and Jamaica reveals stark commonalities and distinctions as women navigate SPEC challenges while striving for upward mobility, power, and positionality. This thesis demonstrates that Black women bear multiple identities, as mothers and primary caregivers, while also shouldering financial responsibilities. The lived experiences of Black women and their access to opportunities are also deeply influenced by their geographic location, which shapes the specific obstacles faced along the journey toward empowerment, social mobility and ultimately creative entrepreneurship.

Across the UK, USA, and Jamaica, Black women are subject to the "motherhood penalty," a concept described by Heather et al. (2020) that refers to the loss of human capital when women, particularly mothers, take time off work, divide their attention between home and work, or make other career sacrifices for their children. In all three countries, Black mothers often bear the dual burden of provider and nurturer, navigating complex work-life dynamics. In the UK and the USA, the motherhood penalty intersects with racial inequalities that exacerbate the economic vulnerabilities of Black mothers. Studies show that Black women in the UK are disproportionately represented in low-paid, insecure jobs, with wage gaps and

discrimination in career advancement limiting their earning potential (ONS, 2020). Similarly, in the USA, Black mothers face lower wages and limited access to childcare and family leave policies that could ease the motherhood penalty (Glynn, 2016). In Jamaica, while there are fewer racial dynamics at play, Black mothers still face significant economic barriers, including high unemployment rates and limited access to social services (Bailey, 2014).

In all three contexts, Black mothers encounter systemic social, political, and economic challenges that shape their lived experiences. In the UK, Black women are often subjected to structural racism that manifests in discriminatory housing policies, educational disparities, and limited access to social services (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018). The "Hostile Environment" immigration policies have also disproportionately affected Black mothers, with many facing precarious legal statuses and economic insecurity (Goodfellow, 2020).

In the USA, the legacy of slavery and segregation continues to impact Black mothers, as they face disproportionate rates of poverty, housing insecurity, and police violence (Alexander, 2010). Mass incarceration, which disproportionately affects Black men, has devastating effects on Black families, often leaving Black women to raise children alone while navigating punitive welfare policies (Roberts, 1997). Policies like the "man-in-the-house" rule and austerity measures have further marginalised Black mothers by penalising them for having male partners in the home, reinforcing the stereotype of the "Welfare Queen" (Wacquant, 2009).

In Jamaica, the socio-political landscape presents a different set of challenges for Black mothers. While race is less of a direct issue, class and gender inequalities are significant barriers. The economic instability of the island, combined with high levels of poverty, means that Black mothers often struggle to provide for their families despite their labour. The informal economy in Jamaica plays a critical role, with many women working as vendors, domestic workers, or in other unregulated jobs, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation (Bailey, 2014). Additionally, gender-based violence and limited access to reproductive health services compound the difficulties Black Jamaican mothers face.

One of the most significant commonalities across these three geographic contexts is the silencing of Black women's voices, which deeply affects their positionality and upward mobility. hooks (1989), in her seminal work *"Talking Back"*, explores the impact of silencing Black women, emphasising how this suppression limits their ability to express the full complexity of their experiences. She states, "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonised, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (hooks, 1989, p. 9). Whether through systemic neglect, societal stereotypes, or outright discrimination,

Black women's voices are often marginalised, leading to their invisibility and SPEC marginalisation.

In the UK, Black women face media portrayals that reinforce negative stereotypes and erase their experiences of systemic oppression (Bhattacharyya, 2018). The British media frequently fails to reflect the diversity of Black motherhood, instead opting for simplistic narratives that cast Black mothers as irresponsible or dependent on state resources. Similarly, in the USA, Black mothers are frequently depicted as "angry" or "difficult," narratives that ignore the structural forces that create hardship in their lives (Boylorn, 2020). In Jamaica, the narrative around Black mothers is also complex but in ways that exist between the celebration of motherhood and the burden of motherhood based on SPEC conditions. While Black women are often celebrated for their strength and resilience, there remains a lack of critical engagement with the ways in which poverty, gender inequality, and violence shape their lives. This thesis offers insight into these nuances through its central autoethnographic story that reflects intergenerational mobility, positionality and entrepreneurship. Therefore, providing insight into both the 1st and 2nd research questions, what systemic and socio-cultural challenges faced by Black girls, women, and mothers serve as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship? And how do Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers who are Black, British and of the Jamaican diaspora navigate and achieve positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment within transatlantic socio-political contexts?

Navigating Creative Entrepreneurship: Black Motherhood Across the Transatlantic

Black motherhood across the UK, USA, and Jamaica is a site of both common struggle and context-specific adaptation, as BFCEMs navigate SPEC challenges in pursuit of upward mobility, empowerment, and positionality. This thesis contends that, as primary caregivers and financial providers, Black mothers are subjected to multiple intersecting oppressions, but these very challenges drive them towards creative entrepreneurship as an essential strategy for resilience and self-determination.

Systemic barriers, while shaped by local histories, reflect a global architecture of gendered and racialised constraint. In the UK and USA, the "motherhood penalty", the loss of income and career progression due to caregiving, as Heather et al. (2020) describes, disproportionately impacts Black women, exacerbated by racial discrimination, workplace exclusion, and a lack of affordable childcare (ONS, 2020; Glynn, 2016). Black mothers are overrepresented in precarious, low-paid, moderate and volatile work, facing compounded economic vulnerability.

In Jamaica, economic exclusion takes a distinct form. Here, Black mothers face less racial stratification but must contend with poverty, informality, and limited social safety nets. As Bailey (2014) and my *“Muva Hustler”* autoethnography illustrate, Jamaican women often rely on informal work, street vending, domestic labour, and cultural production, lacking legal protections but leveraging creativity and entrepreneurial agility for survival. Entrepreneurship in this context is not just a coping mechanism, but a form of agency and upward mobility.

Across all three contexts, creative entrepreneurship is a critical site of Black maternal resistance and community-building. BFCEMs transform adversity into platforms for economic survival, social mobility, and cultural innovation. In the UK, Black mothers launch small businesses, freelance in creative industries, and build community enterprises, demonstrated in *“Mother-Hood”* and *“X31”*, as acts of survival and defiance against austerity and anti-immigrant hostility (Goodfellow, 2020). In the USA, creative ventures in fashion, beauty, technology, and Hip Hop become responses to racialised economic exclusion, offering alternative paths to self-definition beyond *“Welfare Queen”* or *“Mammy”* stereotypes (Roberts, 1997; Wacquant, 2009).

Jamaica’s informal economy foregrounds the intertwining of cultural production and entrepreneurial resilience. Black mothers, through Dancehall, Reggae, and other cultural industries, carve out financial independence and social mobility, even as they confront class, gender, and economic precarity (Hope, 2006; Bailey, 2014). Women like Spice, Lady Saw, and Jada Kingdom exemplify the entrepreneurial and cultural ingenuity required to navigate, and transform, these structures (Thomas, 2004).

Across transatlantic spaces, Black mothers are not merely resisting stereotypes; they are constructing new collective narratives through entrepreneurship. This drive is as much about reclaiming power and community as it is about economic advancement. Hip Hop and Dancehall serve as both battlegrounds and springboards for this work. In Birmingham and New York, Black mothers draw on Hip Hop’s ethos of self-determination and resistance to amplify their voices and foster intergenerational wealth (Rose, 1994; Morgan, 2015). Figures like Lauryn Hill and Queen Latifah have redefined Black motherhood as a site of empowerment and innovation, a theme explored in *“Rhythms of Resistance”* and *“X31.”* In Jamaica, Dancehall mothers similarly deploy their artistry as a strategy for economic agency and social recognition.

In each setting, creative entrepreneurship is inseparable from cultural production and identity work. Black women, whether navigating the grime and Hip Hop scenes of the UK (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018) or the commercial rap landscape of the USA (Boylorn, 2020), strategically leverage music and performance to contest stereotypes and access economic opportunities.

In all contexts, these women engage in complex negotiations of power, survival, and self-making.

Ultimately, this thesis situates Black motherhood at the centre of a global story of resistance, adaptation, and transformation. Through TDBFE and autoethnographic insight, it illuminates how BFCEMs, including myself, turn constraints into creativity, challenging structures, forging new identities, and building legacies that transcend local boundaries. My own journey, woven through these comparative analyses, underscores that creative entrepreneurship for Black mothers is never just economic; it is political, communal, and deeply personal.

The Role of Dancehall in Shaping Black Women's Entrepreneurship

Dancehall culture's emphasis on performance and spectacle creates unique opportunities for Black girls, women and mothers to engage in entrepreneurship. Fashion plays a particularly crucial role in dancehall, where women use style to assert their identity, signal status, and navigate economic limitations. As Stanley-Niaah (2010) points out in her work, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto*, the flamboyant fashion of dancehall women is not merely aesthetic but deeply tied to socio-economic empowerment and social mobility, in addition, I assert it is tied to symbolic power. This is reaffirmed by Swartz (2021), whose recent literature on symbolic power emphasises how marginalised communities use cultural practices to challenge dominant narratives, reshaping societal perceptions of status and identity. In addition to the foundational works of Pierre Bourdieu's framework, *symbolic power* refers to the ability to impose meanings, perceptions, and representations of social reality in ways that legitimise and reinforce existing power structures, often without overt force. It operates subtly, shaping norms and expectations through cultural and symbolic means. In the context of dancehall culture, symbolic power is evident in how dancehall women use flamboyant fashion as a form of resistance and assertion of identity, positioning themselves within and against societal norms. Dancehall queens and artists use their bodies and clothing as tools of self-expression and entrepreneurship, monetising their image through performances, social events and gatherings, and social media.

However, Jamaican dancehall culture also presents a paradox and tensions, as while it offers entrepreneurial opportunities, it simultaneously reinforces gendered expectations and objectification. Black Jamaican women in Dancehall must constantly negotiate between using their sexuality as a form of empowerment and navigating the male-dominated, often exploitative and extractive music industry. These negotiations mirror those seen in Hip Hop

culture, where Black women artists balance between asserting agency and resisting the hypersexualised narratives imposed upon them by a patriarchal industry (Cooper, 2004).

Black mothers in the UK, USA, and Jamaica navigate SPEC challenges through creative entrepreneurship, with music and cultural production serving as central pathways to financial independence and social mobility. Whether through Hip Hop in the UK and USA or Dancehall in Jamaica, these women transform the limitations imposed upon them into opportunities for self-determination. In Jamaica, the informal economy plays a crucial role in this process, as women use dancehall not only to assert their identity but also to challenge the systemic economic inequalities they face. While the entrepreneurial pathways differ across these countries, the resilience and creativity of Black mothers in the face of systemic oppression remain a powerful force for upward mobility and empowerment.

This thesis critically illuminates how the systemic challenges Black mothers face across the UK, USA, and Jamaica propel them toward creative entrepreneurship as a means of survival and empowerment. The intersections of race, gender, and economic precarity, while profoundly limiting, also foster resilience and innovation in Black mothers who draw from both formal and informal economies to assert their agency. By analysing the SPEC challenges across these geographic contexts, this thesis demonstrates how Black mothers reimagine and navigate their paths to empowerment, upward mobility, and positionality through creative entrepreneurship.

This thesis aligns with the works of prominent UK Black women activists like Olivette Otele and Afua Hirsch, who have leveraged their platforms to deconstruct harmful stereotypes and promote a more nuanced understanding of Black motherhood in the British context (Otele, 2020). Through the use of embodied methods such as autoethnography, photo ethnography, and ethnomusicology, this research draws from Jamaican traditions of storytelling and oral histories, integral to preserving the lived experiences of Black mothers. Scholars like Carolyn Cooper (2004) have explored how Jamaican women utilise language, music, and performance as forms of resistance against colonial and postcolonial systems that attempt to silence them. By sharing their stories, BFCEMs not only safeguard their cultural heritage but also actively challenges the gendered, racial, and class-based inequalities that define their existence. This thesis contributes to this tradition, highlighting the critical intersection of cultural production and resistance in the lives of BFCEMs across transatlantic contexts.

The Intersectionality of Stereotypes and Oppressive Systems

These stereotypes do not exist in isolation; they embody the intersection of misogyny and racism and intersect with other forms of oppression, including fatphobia, classism, and fetishisation. Understanding these tropes is crucial for dismantling the systems that oppress Black women both online and offline. Black feminist scholars have long argued that these stereotypes serve to control and limit the identities and roles that Black women can occupy in society, a critique that remains urgent in the context of contemporary media and cultural representations. The intersectionality of these oppressive forces means that the impact of these stereotypes is multifaceted, affecting not only how Black women are perceived by others but also how they perceive themselves.

Reclaiming Jezebel: Black Feminist Resistance, Hip Hop, and Creative Entrepreneurship Across the Transatlantic

Hip Hop culture serves as a complex, contested site for exploring Black identity and body politics, especially for Black women and girls. While Hip Hop has enabled creative resistance and self-expression, it has also perpetuated stereotypes it purports to challenge, prompting critical questions about how the genre shapes Black female identity formation. This is particularly evident for BFCEMs in the UK, USA, and Jamaica, who actively reimagine, resist, and redefine these spaces, including in parallel cultural forms such as Dancehall.

Scholars such as Tricia Rose (2008), Joan Morgan (1999), and Brittney Cooper (2018) highlight Hip Hop's paradox: it is both a platform for Black female empowerment and a perpetuator of misogyny. Black women in Hip Hop have historically contended with the hypersexualised "Jezebel" trope, a colonial and racialised image used to police and diminish Black women's agency (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2017). The Jezebel archetype, rooted in biblical narrative and appropriated in contemporary culture, is commodified within Hip Hop by both male and female artists, seen in the work and personas of Cardi B, Sukihana, Megan Thee Stallion, Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown, and shows like *Baddies*. While these women may reclaim hypersexual imagery as sexual agency, such acts remain fraught with tension, as empowerment is often entangled with ongoing commodification and exploitation.

The emergence of "City Girl" and "Hot Girl" tropes, most notably in Megan Thee Stallion's "Hot Girl Summer", reflects a rebranding of the Jezebel archetype. As Edwards and Esposito (2018) observe, these tropes continue to objectify Black and brown bodies, reinforcing capitalist ideals of hypervisibility and individual success, and commodifying Black women's sexuality for profit. This raises the critical question: Do such acts of reclamation truly

dismantle stereotypes, or do they reinforce a subtler form of capitalist and patriarchal oppression? I address this tension in my chapters “*Muva Hustler*” and “*X3I*,” where I trace how BFCEMs navigate hypermasculine and exploitative landscapes to carve out space for creative autonomy.

Alternative models exist. Artists like Queen Latifah and Missy Elliott reject hypersexual scripts, foregrounding empowerment and resistance to patriarchal norms. As detailed in the chapter “*Rhythm of Resistance*,” these artists expand the narrative possibilities of Black womanhood in Hip Hop, offering counter-narratives of creativity and solidarity.

Across the Atlantic, Dancehall culture in Jamaica mirrors these complexities. Like Hip Hop, Dancehall offers both liberation and constraint for Black women. Scholars such as Cooper (2004) and Stanley Niaah (2010) show how Dancehall women deploy flamboyant fashion and performance as tools of resistance and socio-economic mobility, practices I document in “*Frames of Power*” photo-ethnography and “*My Own Muse*” autoethnographic chapter. Yet, Dancehall is also a space where the “Dancehall Queen” image reproduces the empowerment/exploitation paradox, as women navigate the fine line between agency and commodification (Stanley Niaah, 2010; Edwards & Esposito, 2018).

The globalisation of Hip Hop and Dancehall through social media extends these stereotypes worldwide, reinforcing narrow, hypersexualised images of Black womanhood (Thomas, 2019; Dolby, 2009). These forces constrain how Black women are perceived and the opportunities available to them, even as they work to assert agency and build new narratives.

This thesis argues that within Hip Hop and Dancehall, Black women are positioned simultaneously as agents of cultural production and as subjects of commodification. Through music, fashion, and performance, BFCEMs challenge intersecting systems of capitalism, sexism, and racism, yet their agency is continually circumscribed by the very structures they resist. The TDBFE framework grounds this analysis, situating the experience of BFCEMs in a transnational context and revealing shared strategies of survival, resistance, and creative entrepreneurship across the UK, USA, and Jamaica. In doing so, this research both critiques the persistent constraints faced by Black women and celebrates their innovation, resilience, and collective redefinition of mobility and empowerment. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to the urgent project of amplifying Black women’s voices and advancing transnational solidarity, asserting the necessity of new global narratives of Black womanhood.

Table 1. *Definitions of Race-Based Stereotypes of Black Women*

Raced Based Stereotypes	Definitions
Mammy	The archetype of the portly, asexual and fierce caretaker reinforced the absurdity that Black women will bear any burden, not because they wanted to, but because they were living for it. She is the woman who typically sacrifices her own needs to benefit someone else (Thomas et al., 2004).
Jezebel	This archetype is the image of an immoral, sexually promiscuous, and sexually available Black woman. The stereotype of Jezebel was derived from the sexual exploitation and victimisation of Black women, often to justify sexual relations with enslaved women (Collins, 2004). Black women, seen in this role, are often viewed as promiscuous, loose, immoral, sexual aggressors, and lacking sexual restraint.
Sapphire	This archetype is the image of an aggressive, dominating, angry, emasculating Black woman. The perceptions of Black women from this character include arrogance, being controlling, loud, hostile, obnoxious, and never satisfied (West, 1995). She represents the type of woman who has keen yet sarcastic wit and in some instances is quite abrasive. Her role is one of a “tough as nails” persona, one who is not easily shaken emotionally (Thomas et al., 2004)
Contemporary Matriarch	This archetype is linked to the Black women being the head of the household as the greatest threat to the Black community. Unquestioning belief in that assessment means single Black mothers and their children are demonized (Collins, 2002)
Angry Black woman	A variant of the Sapphire stereotype. This stereotype characterizes Black women as bad-tempered, hostile, overly aggressive, and ignorant without provocation (West, 1995)
The welfare queen	This archetype is connected to images of Black women as “breeders” dating back to slavery (Collins, 2002). The welfare queen is an image of an uneducated, poor, single Black woman who does not want to work but has many children to take advantage of public assistance (Woodard & Mastin, 2005)
Superwoman	This archetype is linked to the pressure and expectation of Black women to manage multiple roles of both homemaker and career women that usually inclusive to one person or gender. This mold of

	being self-reliant and self-contained is damaging in a sense because if you are unable to be self-reliant (i.e., needing extra help with the electric bill) and/or self-contained (i.e., feeling overwhelmed by the extra workload but being proud of being trusted to perform well under pressure) then culturally you aren't a true strong Black woman and you aren't to be depended on.
Thot	This archetype is linked to Black women who are considered to have many casual sexual encounters or relationships (Glass, 2018). It is an acronym for the term "that hoe over there" and "thirsty hoes out there." They are women who pretends to be the type of valuable female commodity who rightfully earns male commitment, until the man discovers that she is just a cheap imitation of a "good girl" who is good only for mindless sex, not relationships or respect.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review highlights the critical intersections of race, gender, class, and age that shape the lived experiences of BFCEMs across transatlantic spaces. By drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, Womanism, Hip Hop Feminism, and Trap Feminism, this chapter demonstrates how BFCEMs navigate oppressive systems while simultaneously reclaiming agency and redefining their positionality in creative and entrepreneurial spaces.

This chapter also contributes to the broader body of scholarship by asserting that the experiences of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood are not monolithic, but diverse and dynamic. The reclamation of narratives, particularly through creative cultural practices such as music, fashion, and entrepreneurship, offers Black women a platform for both resistance and empowerment. In doing so, this literature review provides a foundation for the subsequent chapters, which will further explore the complex interplay between systemic barriers and Black women's resilience, focusing on how BFCEMs reimagine their identities through creative entrepreneurship.

Echoes of Self: Embodied Knowledge and Creative Expression in Black Feminist Research. (Methodology)

Themes: Autoethnography, (Sensory) Photo ethnography, Reflexivity and Ethnomusicology
(Playlist)

*But someday, someone's gonna stand up for me, and sing about me and write about me,
Black and beautiful"*

– Langston Hughes

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework and research design employed to explore the complex experiences of BFCEM within the Caribbean diaspora. The focus is particularly on how these women navigate power dynamics, positionality, and upward mobility across transatlantic spaces, critically engaging with the systems that shape their identities. The research employs a Diasporic Embodied Praxis (DEP) methodology, an approach grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology and developed through autoethnography, photo ethnography, ethnomusicology, interviews, and self-reflexivity. This interconnected methodological approach enables a multi-layered, embodied exploration of identity, culture, and the socio-political conditions shaping the lives of BFCEM. It directly supports the thesis's aims by centring lived experience and revealing how intersecting oppressions, cultural resistance, and Hip Hop aesthetics inform BFCEMs pursuit of empowerment, mobility, and reimagined entrepreneurial identity across transatlantic contexts.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the ontological and epistemological foundations that inform the DEP framework, positioning it within Transatlantic Black Feminist Epistemology (TDBFE). This is enriched by my own positionality as the researcher and subject of the study and the strategic decision to centre my lived experience as a BFCEM within this inquiry. The chapter then outlines the rationale for employing qualitative methods,

highlighting how DEP facilitates a deep engagement with embodied knowledge and sensory experiences. It details the data collection and analysis processes, emphasising the reflexive nature of my methodology, which integrates personal, communal, and cultural narratives. The chapter concludes by addressing the ethical considerations integral to this research, ensuring that the study is conducted with respect and sensitivity and that the voices of participants and the community it seeks to represent are authentically represented and heard.

Ontological and Epistemological Underpinnings

This research is grounded in TDBFE, which provides an intersectional lens for exploring the complexities of BFCEMs. Ontologically, this thesis acknowledges the existence of multiple intersecting realities that shape the experiences of BFCEMs, particularly through the lenses of race, gender, class, and cultural identity, especially in transatlantic spaces.

One of the key contributions of DEP to traditional qualitative methodologies is its ability to offer a more embodied, sensory, and holistic exploration of BFCEMs' lived experiences. Unlike traditional ethnography, which tends to rely heavily on text-based data or verbal accounts, DEP integrates embodied knowledge, cultural practices, and spirituality, providing a richer, more immersive understanding of how BFCEMs navigate their entrepreneurial journeys. Rajan, K. S. (2021) asserts that Diasporic ethnography must now be understood as a multi-situated practice of knowledge, where diasporic scholars themselves engage in methodological rituals that are both corporeal and cosmological, expanding the boundaries of what counts as legitimate research. By layering sensory experiences, such as visual (photo-ethnography), sonic (ethnomusicology and playlists), and textual (autoethnography) data, DEP enables a multidimensional approach that transcends the limitations of traditional ethnographic and autoethnographic methods.

Sensory Engagement in DEP: Enhancing Understanding of Socio-Cultural Context

Traditional ethnographic methods often rely on text and verbal narratives to construct meaning, but DEP moves beyond this, using embodied data to capture the complexities of identity, culture, and resistance. The photo-ethnography chapter and other visual data woven throughout the thesis illuminates the visual aspects of migration, familial mobility, and the socio-cultural landscapes that BFCEMs traverse, offering a tangible representation of their lived realities. This visual data allows the reader to witness the experience of upward

mobility, positionality and intergenerational power, offering insights into the physical spaces that define BFCEMs journey through entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the use of ethnomusicology and playlists as sonic tools in DEP provides a cultural and emotional dimension that is not easily captured through traditional methods. Music, particularly genres like Hip Hop and Dancehall, serves as an auditory backdrop that contextualises BFCEMs identity formation, socio-political engagement, and creative expression. Sound is not just an accompaniment to the narrative but an active agent in shaping the cultural and emotional resonance of the research. For example, specific songs or music styles are employed to reflect and evoke memories of family, cultural roots, or moments of resistance, offering a layered understanding of how BFCEMs use music as a medium for self-definition and empowerment.

The integration of these sensory and embodied elements is a significant departure from traditional ethnographic or autoethnographic methods. While traditional methods may offer insights into the intellectual or verbal expressions of identity, DEP enables a fuller, more immersive experience that includes the emotional and sensory dimensions of Black womanhood and entrepreneurship. Through visual data (photos), sonic data (playlists), and narrative data (autoethnography), DEP provides a multi-layered, holistic exploration of BFCEMs' entrepreneurial practices and identity formation.

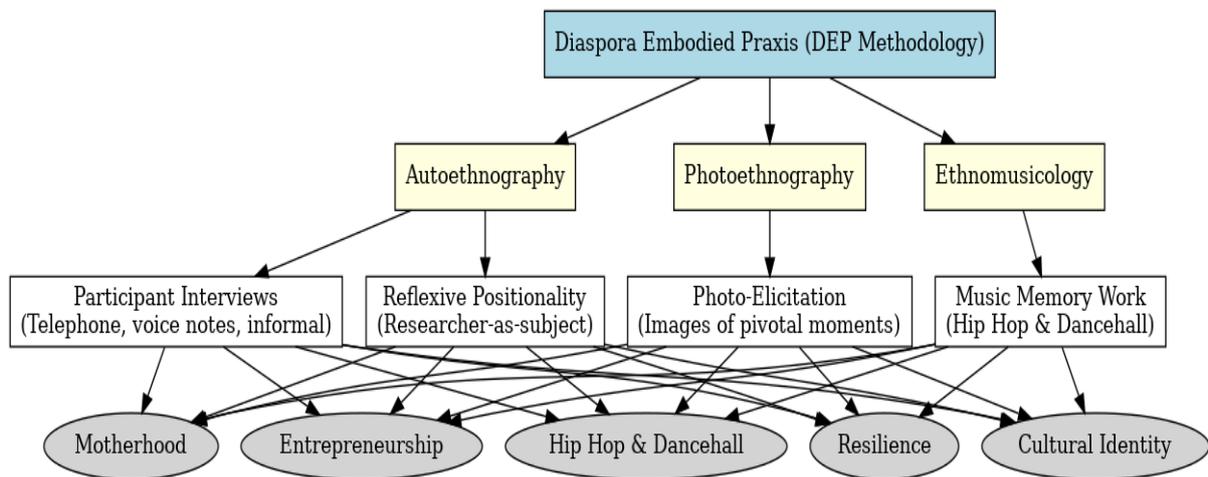


Figure No. visual representation of DEP methodology Atkinson. N (2025)

How the methods reflects DEP:

Autoethnography: Positions you as both subject and researcher, drawing from personal narratives and dialogic interviews with others.

- Photo ethnography: Utilises visual material to elicit deep emotional and cultural narratives.
- Ethnomusicology incorporates sound, rhythm, and Black musical traditions (e.g., Hip Hop, Dancehall) to explore memory, affect, and resistance.
- Thematic threads are not isolated; they intersect across all three methodological routes.

DEP's Response to Research Questions

1. What systemic and socio-cultural challenges faced by Black girls, women, and mothers serve as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship?
2. How do Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers who are Black, British and of the Jamaican diaspora navigate and achieve positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment within transatlantic socio-political contexts?

DEP's integration of photo-ethnography and autoethnography enhances the understanding of how BFCEMs, particularly those of Jamaican heritage, navigate positionality and upward mobility within transatlantic socio-political contexts. The photo-ethnography captures the migration experience and its cultural impact, offering visual insights into how BFCEMs forge connections and create spaces for themselves within global landscapes that often marginalise them. Meanwhile, autoethnography links personal experiences with broader collective narratives, making the invisible struggles of Black women in entrepreneurship visible. Together, these methods highlight how migration and cultural fluidity shape how Jamaican diasporic women navigate and resist exclusion while seeking a place to thrive.

3. How does Hip Hop culture influence the identity formation, entrepreneurial practices, and socio-political engagement of Black girls, women, and mothers, particularly in reshaping their roles as creative entrepreneurs?

DEP contributes significantly to understanding how Hip Hop culture influences the identity formation, entrepreneurial practices, and socio-political engagement of Black girls, women, and mothers, as shown in feminist works by Brown (2009), Gaunt (2006), and Morgan (2015). The integration of ethnomusicology, autoethnography, reflexivity, Informal

unstructured /interviews and photo-ethnography in DEP offers a comprehensive view of cultural production as both resistance and empowerment. Hip Hop and Dancehall serve as a tool for identity formation, challenging dominant narratives and redefining BFCEMs experience. By linking these elements together, DEP not only captures the cultural expressions of BFCEMs but also provides a holistic portrayal of how cultural production shapes entrepreneurial practices and social mobility.

Methodological Foundations: Transatlantic Diasporic Black Feminist Epistemology

This thesis is grounded in TDBFE which recognises embodied, affective, and creative knowledge as legitimate forms of inquiry. Drawing from autoethnography, photo-ethnography, and ethnomusicology, and enriched by participant unstructured interviews and continuous reflexivity, this methodology offers a rigorous, culturally anchored framework for centring the lived experiences of BFCEMs. These approaches intentionally challenge Eurocentric epistemological traditions by elevating narrative, memory, image, and sound as core methods for theorising Black women's lives across transnational terrains.

At its core, DEP aligns with Collins' (2020) assertion that Black feminist knowledge is both situated and collective, shaped at the intersections of race, gender, and class. Building on Crenshaw's (2019) conception of intersectionality as both analytic and praxis based, this methodology interrogates the overlapping systems of oppression shaping the entrepreneurial and emotional lives of BFCEMs across Jamaica, the UK, and the USA.

Paul Gilroy's (1993, 2022) theory of the Black Atlantic deepens this transnational lens, framing the Atlantic as a site of mobility, memory, and hybrid subjectivity. For BFCEMs, entrepreneurship is not solely economic, it is also a cultural and spiritual act of self-determination. This aligns with Gilroy's view of diasporic culture as dynamic, transgressive, and resistant to linear or nation-bound narratives.

Autoethnography plays a pivotal role in making visible the interdependence between personal narrative and structural critique. It offers an embodied mode of analysis where the personal becomes political. As Ferdinand (2015) argues, Black women's lived stories function as counter-narratives that resist erasure and reframe knowledge production. This is echoed by hooks (2015), who emphasises "talking back" as a method of reclaiming epistemic agency. Here, storytelling functions as a tool of resistance, a strategy of survival, and a framework for generative theorising.

Reflexivity, in this context, is not introspection alone, it is an ethical orientation. Ahmed (2021) describes complaint as a radical form of institutional resistance: a refusal to be

silenced. Following this, reflexivity becomes a mode of accountability in how visual (photo-ethnography) and sonic (ethnomusicological) data are interpreted and situated. My own experiences, as both insider and researcher, are thus mobilised as methodological tools, tempered by critical awareness and collaborative validation.

Photo-ethnography allows participants to articulate memory, identity, and motherhood through visual media, aligning with Rose's (2016) work on visual culture as a form of embodied knowledge. Simultaneously, ethnomusicology, centred here on Hip Hop and Dancehall, unpacks music as archive, language, and resistance. Scholars such as Gaunt (2006) and Brown (2009) highlight how Black musical forms function as identity work, particularly for Black girls and women. These sonic expressions are epistemological in their own right: they communicate histories, dreams, and socio-political critique through rhythm and performance.

Through DEP, these methods converge to present a decolonial, multi-sensory, and participatory epistemology. It moves beyond description to enact a praxis of knowing, feeling, and remembering otherwise. Rather than asking BFCEMs to conform to academic conventions, DEP adapts methodology to honour their cultural logics, emotional textures, and entrepreneurial strategies.

Cultural Relevance and Representation

This methodology is intentionally culturally relevant, recognising the centrality of storytelling within Black diasporic communities. As hooks (2015) asserts, storytelling is not ancillary but fundamental, passing on values, critique, and memory in ways that resist dominant historical narratives. By foregrounding these in narratives in our own words, this thesis disrupts Western epistemologies that have long marginalised or distorted Black voices.

Collins (2000) articulates Black women's lived experience as a "crucial epistemological standpoint," one that challenges academic hegemonies and demands a more intersectional understanding of entrepreneurship, labour, and social reproduction. The methodology employed here not only centres Black women's cultural practices but also reconfigures who counts as a legitimate knowledge producer.

In line with Tuck and Yang (2012), decolonisation is not achieved through inclusion alone, it requires a fundamental shift in how research is conceptualised. DEP takes up this call by resisting extractive models and instead facilitating co-creation, reciprocity, and epistemic justice. This thesis thus addresses critical gaps in the literature around Black girlhood,

womanhood, and entrepreneurship, making space for Black women as agents of economic, emotional, and cultural transformation.

Further, McKittrick (2021) urges that engaging Black women's narratives allows us to remap how space, identity, and belonging are constructed within capitalist, racialised systems. This geographic lens reframes entrepreneurship not as an isolated economic practice but as spatial and relational survival work. By making this visible, DEP contributes to a critical reimagining of knowledge that privileges Black feminist worldviews, values, and voice.

Autoethnography as a Method of Centring Black Feminist Narrative

Autoethnography serves as a pivotal methodological framework in this thesis, enabling a deeply nuanced exploration of the personal narratives that intersect with broader SPEC structures shaping the lives of BFCEMs within the Jamaican diaspora. Robin M. Boylorn's work on the power of personal narrative has been influential in this approach, as she emphasises that autoethnography allows researchers to "name and make meaning from our lived experiences in ways that are accessible and transformative" (Boylorn, 2017, p. 89). For Black women, whose voices have been systematically excluded from mainstream narratives, autoethnography not only centres personal stories but also validates them as essential to understanding broader cultural phenomena. This methodology aligns with Boylorn's assertion that "stories are not only meaningful; they are necessary" (2017, p. 92), affirming the relevance of individual experiences in capturing the complexity of Black women's identities, struggles, and resilience.

In my autoethnographic practice, I integrate visual sampling, reflexivity, and memory work by searching through personal photos, videos, cassettes, diaries, and documents from the early stages of my entrepreneurial journey. Visual sampling allows me to select and analyse significant moments, such as family gatherings or key business milestones, which serve as reflective triggers for memory work (Pink, 2013). This process involved re-engaging with these memories through written diaries, informal discussions with family members, previous colleagues, and friends, and revisiting business documents, providing a layered understanding of my experiences as a BFCEMs. Reflexivity is central, as it encouraged me to critically examine how my positionality, emotions, and history influence the interpretation of these materials (Ellis, 2004). As noted above, ethical considerations were crucial at each stage of the methodological process, ensuring that personal memories and family contributions are handled with care, maintaining privacy, consent, and integrity in representation (Pink, 2013; Ellis, 2007).

Participant Sampling and Multi-Modal Data Collection Strategies within Diaspora Embodied Praxis

To explore the entrepreneurial journeys of BFCEMs concerning the central autoethnographic narrative, I recruited six women of Jamaican heritage residing in England. These participants were purposively selected based on their lived experiences within the creative industries, entrepreneurship, motherhood, and diasporic identity. This focus reflects an intentional commitment to Diaspora Embodied Praxis (DEP), which privileges lived, embodied, and spiritual knowledge as valid epistemological sources (Bakare-Yusuf, 2000; Rajan, 2021). The selection of this specific cohort reflects a broader effort to centre intersectional Black feminist subjectivities often marginalised in entrepreneurship and migration studies (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000) and creative industries.

Participants were located through cultural, professional, and creative networks. The interviews adopted an open, conversational format, using telephone (Irvine et al., 2012; Arksey & Knight, 1999), in-person exchanges, and voice notes, to create intimate, flexible spaces that respected participants' time, emotional labour, and creativity. This aligns with DEP's commitment to fluid, relational modes of knowledge exchange, where storytelling, affect, and rhythm shape data production.

To elicit deeper reflection and sensory engagement, photo-elicitation was incorporated. Participants shared personal images representing key entrepreneurial or mothering milestones. These visuals became cultural texts in their own right, enabling rich explorations of memory, identity, and diaspora (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2016). This aligns with DEP's valuation of visual embodiment as a methodological portal.

Furthermore, music-based memory work, centred around Hip Hop and Dancehall, activated affective, ancestral, and autobiographical layers of narrative. Participants reflected on how music informed their self-making and entrepreneurial drive, drawing from genres culturally and politically rooted in Black resistance (Brown, 2009; Gaunt, 2006).

To expand beyond individual interviews, a digital ethnographic lens was applied. YouTube interviews, Instagram posts, and other online expressions were observed to explore how BFCEMs curate and perform resilience and creativity in public-facing platforms (Gray, 2019; Noble, 2018). This methodological hybridity reflects DEP's attentiveness to how diasporic knowledge flows across online and offline spaces.

Throughout this process, reflexivity remained integral. As both a researcher and diasporic BFCEMs, I acknowledged how shared positionality shaped the research dynamics. Following Pillow (2003, p. 193) treats reflexivity not as self-disclosure, but as a critical

method of accountability, an effort to “*stay present in the process*” and resist co-opting participant voice for narrative coherence.

Photo Ethnography, Ethnomusicology and Sensory Ethnography

Photo-ethnography, as part of the Diasporic Embodied Praxis (DEP) methodology, offers a critical, embodied approach to documenting the lived experiences of Black women entrepreneurs (BFCEMs). This visual method captures the emotional, familial, and spatial dimensions of BFCEMs' lives, amplifying narratives that are often marginalised in traditional archives. By integrating visual data such as family photos and cultural artefacts, photo-ethnography reveals layers of meaning that complement other qualitative methods like interviews, autoethnography, and ethnomusicology, offering a holistic representation of Black women's entrepreneurial resilience and agency.

Recent scholarship emphasises the importance of visual and embodied knowledge in understanding BFCEMs' lived realities. Scholars such as Campt (2017) highlight how images can serve as powerful sites for cultural and historical reclamation, while Hartman (2019) argues that visual methodologies offer counter-archives that resist colonial historiographies. Photo-ethnography, when layered with autoethnography, provides deeper insight into the personal and collective experiences of BFCEMs, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how race, gender, and culture intersect in their entrepreneurial practices. Ethnomusicology further enriches this by illustrating the role of music, particularly Hip Hop and Dancehall, in shaping BFCEMs' identities and business strategies.

This interconnected methodology is a radical act of resistance, reclaiming space and visibility for Black women in diasporic contexts. It positions BFCEMs as authors of their own histories, challenging the erasure of their creative and economic contributions. By foregrounding embodied, visual, and sonic knowledge, photo-ethnography not only documents resilience but also asserts the validity of non-textual ways of knowing, aligning with recent work by scholars like McKittrick (2021) and Pink (2015), who advocate for multi-sensory, participatory research that honours lived experience. This approach offers a transformative framework for exploring BFCEMs' resilience and empowerment through creative entrepreneurship.

Employing photo ethnography provides a visual and sensory sampling of environments, relationships, and symbols that reflect the lived realities of myself as a BFCEM. Drawing on Sarah Pink's work on sensory ethnography, this methodology emphasises the value of “visual and sensory material as embodied knowledge” (Pink, 2015, p. 23), capturing the

socio-spatial and cultural elements that influence Black girls, women and mothers' experiences, including the interplay of space, place, culture, spirituality, and their ongoing intergenerational pursuit of liberation in everyday life towards entrepreneurship. It also focuses on both personal and communal narratives, revealing the intricate dynamics of power and identity formation (Pink, 2015; Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015).

Visual sampling is employed to represent the affective and relational aspects of my BFCEM experience, allowing for a deeper exploration of how I create, navigate and sustain connections in spaces often marked by exclusion. In practice throughout the research process, I searched through family archives and photos to uncover visual histories and establish a form of narrative reclamation from my perspective. As I found each image and reflected, I engaged in informal discussions with family members to contextualise the photos and draw out memories and stories, a method akin to photo elicitation (Harper, 2002). This method fosters a deeper engagement with the visual data and enriches the understanding of the narratives represented (Harper, 2002). Additionally, the research involved co-creation with family members, which provided additional layers of context and meaning to the images and narratives, aligning with participatory research principles (Cohen & Manion, 2017).

By selecting key photos that reflect pivotal moments in my girlhood, womanhood and motherhood journey towards entrepreneurship, I connected personal and cultural narratives, focusing on elements such as family/heritage, ambition/aspiration, creativity, Black love and resilience, motherhood and identity. The outcome of this photo ethnography is the early creation of a visual archive that offers a richly contextualised portrayal of a BFCEMs experiences, cultural practices, and entrepreneurial endeavours. Foregrounding personal and collective narratives, photo-ethnography plays a critical role in documenting and narrating these experiences, aligning with Black feminist epistemological principles that emphasise agency and resilience (Collins, 2000; Nash, 2018) The ethics of this method were crucial, requiring consent from family members and mindful representation to ensure that their images and stories are shared respectfully.

Ethnomusicology, The Intentional, Embodied Use Of Sound/Music

The ethnomusicological dimension of this thesis draws on Tricia Rose's (2019) foundational analysis of Hip Hop as a cultural site where marginalised voices disrupt dominant narratives and forge modes of identity, resistance, and empowerment. Rose asserts that Hip Hop provides "a cultural space where the least powerful groups in society can represent themselves" (p. 81), a framing deeply resonant with the lived experiences of BFCEMs.

Within this thesis, music is not simply illustrative, it is constitutive. It operates as an effective archive, an epistemic resource, and a method of theorising from the margins.

Kyra Gaunt's (2006) work on the embodied musical practices of Black girls, particularly the "hidden musicianship" found in everyday expressions like double-dutch, clapping games, and lyrical improvisation, challenges ethnomusicology to recognise the performative, kinaesthetic, and often overlooked spaces where Black musical knowledge is produced. Methodologically, this insight is extended here: sound, movement, and rhythm are approached not as aesthetic supplements but as analytic tools that capture the fluidity and hybridity of diasporic life.

Ethnomusicology in this study, therefore, functions as a decolonial and sensory methodology, one that foregrounds not only what music says, but what it does: how it moves, holds, heals, and remembers. As Stoever (2020) argues, "listening is a site of racialised knowledge production," implicating the researcher in an ethics of aurality that refuses neutrality (p. 12). Methodologically, this means treating playlists, lyrical content, sonic texture, and genre shifts as both data and dialogue, revealing how BFCEMs mobilise musical practice to assert voice, construct entrepreneurial identity, and narrate transatlantic belonging.

Contemporary scholars have continued to evolve ethnomusicology as a politicised praxis. Davis and Moore (2022) argue that Black women's sonic expressions must be understood as both cultural labour and epistemological intervention, shaping not only soundscapes but worldviews. Similarly, Decker and Brooks (2021) insist that ethnomusicology must be attuned to the gendered politics of performance and production, particularly in digital and diasporic contexts where voice, body, and brand converge.

Incorporating Hip Hop and Dancehall into the BFCEMs journey is thus not only a cultural affirmation but an intentional act of defiance against systemic exclusion. It reclaims sonic space as a platform for self-definition, emotional legibility, and economic strategy. Here, music is a living methodology, multisensory, mobile, and insurgent, capable of holding grief, joy, ambition, and refusal all at once.

Additionally, the inclusion of ethnomusicology directly aligns with the thesis's inquiry into the influence of Hip Hop culture on entrepreneurial practices and identity formation. The DEP framework acknowledges the centrality of cultural production, particularly through music, as a means of resistance and empowerment for Black women. By examining how BFCEMs use music and other forms of creative expression to assert agency and navigate socio-economic mobility, the methodology underscores the transformative role of creativity in both personal and collective resistance. This intersectional and culturally grounded approach positions the

DEP methodology as the most fitting lens for addressing the complex realities of BFCEMs, providing a comprehensive understanding of their entrepreneurial journeys while honouring the significance of cultural expression in shaping identity and resistance.

Playlist as Ethnomusicological Praxis and Reflective Methodology

This thesis adopts the playlist not merely as a supplementary feature but as a critical methodological tool, one that transforms sound into an active site of knowledge production within Black feminist inquiry. Building upon the field of ethnomusicology, which recognises music as a socially embedded and embodied practice (Stobart, 2021), the curated playlist functions as a reflective archive, a sonic narrative, and a pedagogical device. It facilitates an immersive engagement with the lived realities of BFCEMs, offering an alternative epistemology that privileges affect, rhythm, and cultural memory over textual abstraction.

Music, particularly within Black diasporic traditions, mediates the interplay of struggle, resistance, and transcendence. Scholars such as Feld (2012) and Turino (2008) have long argued that sound carries social and spiritual meanings beyond aesthetic expression. More recently, Brito (2022) and Rivera-Rideau (2023) reframe Black music as a decolonial archive that makes audible the structural conditions and creative insurgency of marginalised communities. By curating a playlist, I activate this archive, rendering audible the emotional, psychological, and spiritual terrains that BFCEMs traverse, motherhood, migration, economic precarity, and cultural resilience.

This method aligns with Pink's (2015) sensory ethnography, where research must account for multisensory modes of knowing. The playlist allows for "synaesthetic witnessing" (Cummings, 2021), where sound enables a deeper encounter with the textures of Black life. It reflects both the sonic geographies and inner landscapes of the women in this study, offering insights into how music is used to affirm identity, process trauma, and assert entrepreneurial agency. In this context, music is not simply background, it is narrative, theory, and resistance.

Framed through Hip Hop feminism and trap feminism (Morgan, 2015; Bowen, 2021), the playlist embodies subversive cultural production. Tracks were curated to reflect the ethos of "bad bitch politics," sonic self-love, and diasporic defiance. These choices offer critical commentary on systemic oppression while showcasing how BFCEMs reclaim power through genre, lyric, and beat. As Perry (2023) reminds us, "Hip Hop articulates the emotional lives of Black women that history books often omit." Thus, the playlist becomes both counter-archive and cultural analytics.

The interpretive act of curation itself, what to include, in what order, and why, constitutes a form of analytical labour. As Barrett and Millner (2013) argue, this act reveals the researcher's positionality and shapes the story being told. My selections reflect diasporic entanglements across Jamaica, the UK, and the USA, mapping a transatlantic sonic terrain that mirrors BFCEMs hybrid identities. Sound, then, becomes a method of sense-making, an aural theory that weaves personal, communal, and political memory.

Crucially, the playlist bridges the gap between lived experience and academic critique. It provides a multisensory conduit through which readers/listeners can feel the tensions of structural exclusion and the pulse of creative survival. It complements autoethnographic data by giving emotional contour and cultural texture to the narratives explored. This aligns with Born's (2011) argument that "sound holds the capacity to trouble dominant knowledge regimes."

In sum, the playlist emerges in this thesis not only as an affective supplement to text, but as a decolonial method that centres music as theory, archive, and cultural critique. It challenges Western academic conventions by placing sound at the core of epistemological inquiry. As a living, curated, and shareable artefact, it extends the reach of this research into digital and diasporic communities, embodying a commitment to accessible, embodied, and insurgent scholarship.

Temporal and Spatial Dimensions of the Playlist

Playlists capture the temporal and spatial dimensions of music in ways that text alone cannot. Music is inherently temporal, unfolding over time, and deeply intertwined with specific places and social contexts. In this case, the playlist draws from the rich musical landscapes of the UK, Jamaica, and the USA, crossing both intergenerational and contemporary timelines. As Gilroy (1993) posits, "music serves as a vehicle for expressing the diasporic experience, linking different temporalities and geographies through sound" (p. 115). This playlist seeks to evoke the temporal flow of the everyday soundscape of Black female maturation across the transatlantic towards a journey of creative entrepreneurship, offering a richer understanding of how music functions within these varied cultural contexts.

By organising tracks in a sequence that consciously merges time, space, and lived experience, I, as the researcher, provide the listener/reader with an opportunity to experience the temporal rhythms that shape these identities. As Feld (2015) discusses, "Soundscapes are not just auditory experiences but are infused with the temporal and spatial dynamics of the communities they represent" (p. 67). This approach allows listeners

to move through time and space in a way that complements and deepens the written analysis, offering a multisensory experience that resonates with the broader themes of Black female identity and the diasporic journey.

The playlist, therefore, becomes a tool not only for evoking memory and place but also for facilitating an experiential understanding of the social and cultural contexts being explored. As McKittrick (2006) articulates, "the transatlantic movements of Black people have produced complex geographies and temporalities that are best understood through the interplay of music, memory, and place" (p. 92). By curating a playlist that reflects the complexities of Black girlhood, womanhood, motherhood, and creative entrepreneurship, this thesis not only engages with music as a form of cultural expression but also reinforces the theoretical underpinnings of TDBFE. This approach ties together Black feminist thought, Womanism, Hip Hop feminism, trap feminism, and intersectionality, creating a comprehensive framework that honours the layered experiences of Black women across different geographies and time periods. Music, as a dynamic and transnational medium, mediates the shared yet distinct histories of oppression, resistance, and creativity faced by Black women in the transatlantic space. By engaging with the works of Joan Morgan, Sesali Bowen, and bell hooks, the playlist not only documents but sonically articulates the political and social realities that these frameworks examine. Through this auditory experience, the playlist embodies the principles of intersectionality, linking race, gender, and class in ways that traditional scholarship may overlook, while also giving voice to the cultural practices that form the backbone of Black women's resistance and agency across the African Caribbean diaspora. This sensory method enhances the thesis's goal of ensuring that Black women's stories are central to both academic discourse and cultural narratives.

Accessibility and Dissemination

Employing a playlist as part of this research significantly enhances both the accessibility and dissemination of its findings. In the digital age, this playlist can be effortlessly shared through online platforms, thereby extending its reach well beyond traditional academic circles. As Sterne (2012) argues, "the digital mediation of sound has transformed how music is circulated, consumed, and understood, creating new opportunities for engagement and participation" (p. 29). This democratisation of access not only broadens the impact of the research but also fosters meaningful dialogue between me as the researcher, the reader/listener, and the wider communities who engage with this work.

By incorporating the playlist into this ethnographic thesis, I aim to create a more engaging and inclusive form of scholarship. This approach aligns with the call for more participatory

and interactive research methodologies in ethnomusicology, as highlighted by Spivak (2010), who notes that "inclusive scholarship is not just about who gets to speak, but how we create spaces for multiple forms of expression to coexist" (p. 54). The playlist invites listeners to experience the music on its own terms and in its authentic context, thus enriching their understanding of the cultural and social landscapes explored in the thesis.

Furthermore, as Nowak (2016) suggests, "the integration of digital media into ethnographic research allows for the creation of dynamic, multimodal narratives that engage diverse audiences" (p. 221). By leveraging the accessibility of the playlist, this research not only reaches a broader audience but also encourages a more interactive and participatory form of engagement, bridging the gap between academic scholarship and lived experiences.

Reflexivity and Personal Engagement

This research is grounded in a reflexive, autoethnographic methodology that positions my lived experience as a BFCEM at the centre of knowledge production. As both subject and researcher, my positionality shapes the formulation of research questions, the interpretation of data, and the ethical commitments of this work. Drawing from TDBFE, this reflexive stance allows for a nuanced engagement with the SPEC challenges that BFCEMs face in transatlantic contexts.

Autoethnography is employed not simply to document experience, but to critically interrogate how personal narratives illuminate broader structural conditions. As Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue, autoethnography transforms lived experience into critical insight, though not without the attendant risks of projection and bias. I was therefore vigilant in interrogating how my own healing journey and evolving social positioning influenced the data I foregrounded. Through continuous reflexive journaling, "sense-checking" dialogues with peers, and a rigorous examination of resonance and distance, I worked to mitigate the potential for self-projection and to honour the multiplicity of BFCEMs voices. This aligns with McKittrick's (2021) assertion that a researcher's positionality, when critically examined, can deepen rather than dilute the rigour of inquiry.

This interplay between subjectivity and scholarship renders the thesis not merely academic but transformative. My identity as a BFCEM offers unique insight into the emotional and cultural textures of creative labour, while also demanding critical awareness of how my narrative might shape, or obscure, those of others. Muncey (2010) reminds us of the ethical imperative to resist allowing one's voice to become the "definitive truth." As such, I

continuously negotiated my dual role as insider and observer, a position that required ethical attentiveness and methodological clarity.

Reflexivity and Voice: Embracing Situated Subjectivity

The first-person perspective adopted in this research is not a confessional gesture but a deliberate political and methodological choice. By centring my narrative, I challenge the detachment and neutrality often valorised in traditional research paradigms. This positioning is particularly important in research on marginalised communities, where insider knowledge can serve as a corrective to dominant misrepresentations (Collins, 2000). However, this dual role carries ethical risks. As Spivak (1988) cautions, marginalised voices are often appropriated or reduced to symbolic value. To resist this, I employed a strategy of reflexive co-creation, engaging in ongoing dialogue in the form of unstructured interviews with other BFCMs to test, refine, and validate my interpretations.

This practice is informed by Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) call for research that is reciprocal and empowering, and Pink's (2015) model of collaborative ethnography, which emphasises the co-production of knowledge. Through open-ended, relational sense-making, I invited critique of my own assumptions, ensuring that my voice was not elevated above those I represent but situated alongside them in mutual recognition. This methodology safeguards against self-tokenisation and reinforces the integrity of the research by preserving the complexity and authenticity of Black women's lived experiences in creative spaces.

By embracing subjectivity as a methodological asset rather than a liability, this thesis contributes to a broader project of Black feminist epistemic sovereignty, one that not only represents but reclaims the authority of Black women to narrate, theorise, and transform their worlds.

Ethical Considerations

This research is grounded in an ethical framework centred on cultural sensitivity, intersectionality, and diasporic accountability. As a Black British woman of Jamaican heritage conducting autoethnographic research within my own transatlantic community, I was acutely aware of the cultural, historical, and SPEC dimensions shaping the experiences of Black girls, women, mothers, creatives, and entrepreneurs. These complexities necessitated a methodological and ethical approach informed by TDBFE.

TDBFE, complements the work of Boyce Davies (1994), recognising that Black women's knowledge production is inextricably tied to their transnational struggles against colonialism, enslavement, and systemic exclusion. This framework foregrounds the situated, embodied, and collective dimensions of knowledge while critiquing dominant Eurocentric epistemologies. Hill Collins (2000) conceptualises this as an "interlocking system of oppression" that shapes Black women's lived realities, particularly across race, gender, and class. Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality further clarifies how these axes of marginalisation converge, demanding analytical and ethical attention in any research involving Black women.

The ethical foundation of this research extends beyond procedural ethics. It draws on decolonial praxis, emphasising benefit and accountability to the community. As Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues, ethical research must serve the interests of the communities studied. In this spirit, I engaged in informal "sense-checking" dialogues with other BFCEMs to ensure that the research resonated with and supported their lived realities. Pink (2015) describes this as "community validation", an approach that fosters relational accountability between researcher and participants. However, such engagement is not without risks. Spivak (1988) cautions against the instrumentalisation of marginalised voices, particularly when such inclusion is extractive or performative. I remained critically aware of these dynamics and worked to avoid reproducing such ethical pitfalls.

Data collection incorporated unstructured interviews, personal memory work, and digital ethnographic materials such as publicly available YouTube content and social media. While these materials are technically public, I treated them with the same ethical care as primary data, respecting creators' intent, dignity, and narrative integrity. All participants received information sheets and provided informed consent verbally or in writing, in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. Anonymity was maintained where requested, without diminishing narrative authenticity.

Reflexivity was not an optional add-on but an ethical imperative. Throughout the research, I reflected continuously on my positionality, biases, and evolving identity as a BFCEMs and scholar. Drawing on Tracy (2010), reflexivity was a mechanism of self-accountability, allowing me to remain present and self-aware within the research process. Ahmed (2021) frames such reflection as a form of institutional resistance, refusing to reproduce systems of erasure and silencing. I drew upon 30 years of personal diaries, memory work, and informal conversations to surface layers of experience and challenge any unexamined assumptions in my interpretations.

This reflexive method aligns with Ellis et al. (2011), who position autoethnography as an approach that connects personal narrative to wider cultural and political structures. Anderson (2006) further argues that emotionally grounded storytelling must be tethered to rigorous analysis. In my practice, vulnerability was not used for an affective effect but employed intentionally, in line with Ellis and Bochner's (2000) call for honest and meaningful engagement with one's lived experience. I was selective in what I shared, aligning disclosures with the broader themes of the thesis, race, gender, creative labour, and resistance.

At the same time, I remained mindful of the risks identified by Muncey (2010), who warns that personal narratives may obscure other perspectives if not critically examined. I therefore ensured that my story was in conversation with, rather than in place of, those of other BFCEMs.

This thesis embraces McKittrick's (2021) argument that embodied knowledge is not only legitimate but essential for understanding the racialised and gendered geographies of Black life. By centring lived experience, memory, sound, and emotion, this research contributes to a broader commitment to ethical scholarship, one that, as Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest, moves beyond critique to transformation.

In sum, the ethical considerations underpinning this research are not separate from its methodological innovation. They are woven into its very design, ensuring that the voices, bodies, and experiences of Black women are treated with the care, respect, and epistemological recognition they deserve.

Methodological Limitations and Critical Reflections

One central methodological concern is the prominence of autoethnography. While it provides rich, introspective insight into my lived experience as a BFCEMs, it also raises issues of generalisability and potential bias (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2022). The subjective nature of autoethnography demands a high degree of reflexivity to critically assess how personal assumptions may shape interpretation. To address this, I engaged in continuous reflective journaling and triangulated my experiences through informal conversations/ unstructured interviews with other BFCEMs, offering a more collective and balanced representation.

The integration of multiple theoretical frameworks, Black Feminist Thought, Womanism, Intersectionality, and Hip Hop Feminism, also posed challenges. Each tradition is grounded in distinct intellectual and cultural genealogies: Black Feminist Thought centres U.S.-based

Black women's epistemologies (Collins, 2020), while Womanism, grounded in Walker's (1983) framing, foregrounds global perspectives, spirituality, and community.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017) offers an analytical lens for the interlocking structures of oppression, whereas Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 2018) is rooted in cultural expression and youth activism. While these frameworks offer rich, overlapping insights, synthesising them risks theoretical dilution or contradiction. For instance, Black Feminist Thought's academic grounding may seem at odds with the grassroots, cultural praxis of Hip Hop Feminism (Davis, 2021; Johnson, 2022), and the U.S.-centric focus of some frameworks may appear to conflict with the transnational and Caribbean diasporic scope of this thesis (Nash, 2018).

However, I argue that these tensions are generative rather than limiting. Black girls, women, mothers, and creatives in transatlantic spaces live and theorise in multifaceted ways. The synthesis of these frameworks within my TDBFE allows for a layered, interdisciplinary lens that reflects the lived complexity of BFCEMs. TDBFE emerges as a methodological intervention that holds space for contradiction, global specificity, and generational dialogue. It acknowledges that resistance, identity formation, and creative entrepreneurship occur across academic, cultural, spiritual, sonic, and emotional, offering a coherent yet expansive framework that accounts for local and diasporic realities (Morgan, 2018; McKittrick, 2021).

A further methodological challenge lies in translating sensory and embodied experiences into analytical data. The use of photo-ethnography, playlists, and other multimodal forms foregrounds affect and embodiment, but such data resist conventional textual representation. As Pink (2015) notes, embodied experiences often elude fixed interpretation, and their analysis demands attentiveness to nuance, ambiguity, and emotional resonance. Stoller (2019) similarly warns of the limitations of language in capturing multisensory realities, which can result in fragmentation or loss of meaning. To mitigate this, I deployed a reflexive analytic process grounded in sensory ethnography, preserving the affective textures of participants' and my own experiences without forcing premature coherence.

Generational tensions also shaped this research. Older theoretical frameworks often emphasise structural critique and institutional change, while newer ones prioritise grassroots cultural production and immediacy (Davis, 2021). TDBFE negotiates this by bridging traditional academic discourses with contemporary cultural forms, allowing for intergenerational dialogue and epistemic fluidity. This intersectional, multimodal approach enables a more holistic understanding of Black women's entrepreneurship by integrating structural critique with cultural expression.

Selective Inclusion and Narrative Focus

A related concern involves the selective inclusion of personal narratives. Guided by the central research questions, I focused on experiences most relevant to my identity as a BFCEM. As Jones, Adams and Ellis (2016) assert, “the personal is political” (p. 22), and this selectivity allowed me to highlight rarely heard perspectives while maintaining narrative cohesion. While I acknowledge the valid critique that omitting aspects such as romantic relationships and friendships might narrow the scope of analysis (Bochner and Ellis, 2016), the experience of motherhood is paramount here. I maintain that this thesis engages the “messiness” of lived experience through its focus on the intersections of Blackness, womanhood, motherhood, creativity, entrepreneurship, and intergenerational legacy, domains central to the research objectives. My narrative avoids the pitfalls of “narrative smoothing” (Sparkes, 2002), instead aligning with Denzin’s (2014) argument that purposeful, focused autoethnography can preserve depth while maintaining coherence. Exclusions were not evasions, but methodological decisions aligned with the epistemological commitment to honouring BFCEM experience in a way that is rigorous, relevant, and culturally grounded.

Conclusion: Towards a Sensory, Reflexive, and Decolonial Methodology

This thesis establishes the DEP as a transformative methodological framework grounded in TDBFE. DEP enables a multisensory, intersectional, and reflexive inquiry into the lives of BFCEMs, foregrounding their lived realities through autoethnography, photo-ethnography, sensory ethnography, ethnomusicology, reflexivity, and unstructured interviews. It rejects extractive, text-dominant research traditions and instead positions memory, sound, image, and narrative as valid, rigorous modes of theorisation. Through this layered approach, the research moves beyond representation to enact a decolonial praxis of presence, accountability, and creative resistance.

DEP challenges dominant Euro-Western epistemologies that have historically marginalised or distorted Black women’s voices. It reclaims knowledge production as an embodied and culturally located act. Drawing on Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2020), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2019), Womanism (Walker, 1983), and Hip Hop Feminism (Morgan, 2015; Bowen, 2021), the research makes visible the complex socio-political structures BFCEMs navigate across Jamaica, the UK, and the USA. These intersecting oppressions, along race, gender, class, creative entrepreneurship and motherhood, are not only documented but reimaged through creative expression and sonic storytelling.

The innovative integration of photo-ethnography and curated playlists expands traditional methodological boundaries. These tools do more than illustrate findings; they constitute a living, breathing archive of diasporic knowledge and cultural memory. Music is not background; it is epistemology. Photography is not illustrative; it is evidentiary. Together, these methods offer effective insight into how BFCEMs forge entrepreneurial pathways, rework dominant narratives, and assert agency in spaces designed to exclude them.

In doing so, the thesis contributes both conceptually and methodologically to Black Feminist, Diaspora, and Creative Industry Studies. It proposes DEP not only as a methodology but as a political orientation, one that embraces vulnerability, honours lived experience, and recognises storytelling, rhythm, and visuality as legitimate forms of knowledge. This approach is especially urgent in an academic landscape where marginalised communities are still expected to conform to disembodied, universalist modes of inquiry.

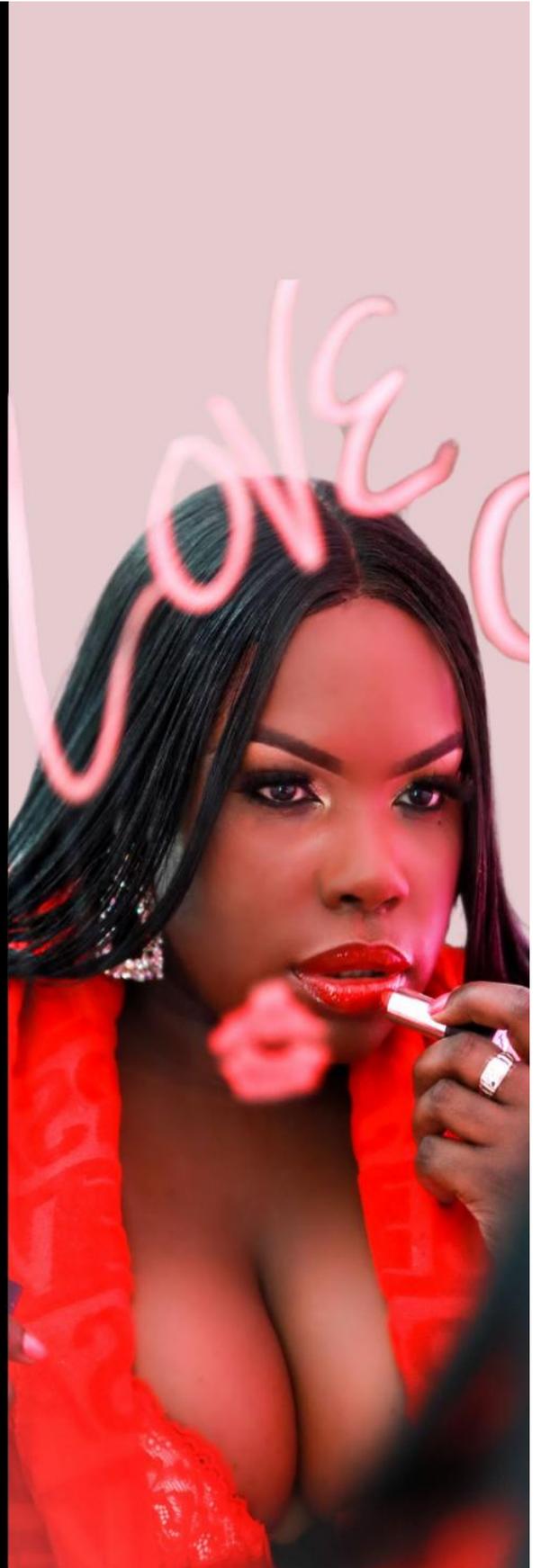
The interdisciplinary and multimodal nature of DEP also sets a precedent for future research that centres Black women's experiences across geographic, generational, and cultural contexts. Its commitment to accessibility and dissemination, through tools like the playlist, extends scholarship beyond the academy and into the digital and cultural worlds where Black knowledge is continuously being made and remade. In this way, DEP offers both a theoretical and practical intervention, providing models for scholars, policymakers, artists, and organisers seeking to understand and support Black women's creative and economic resilience.

Ultimately, this thesis reasserts that Black women are not simply objects of study; we are theorists, cultural producers, and architects of alternative futures. The DEP methodology insists that their stories be told not only with analytical precision but with the fullness of sound, vision, memory, and feeling. In doing so, it amplifies voices too often silenced, expands the terrain of academic inquiry, and affirms the power of diasporic Black womanhood as a source of knowledge, resistance, and transformation.

PHASE 1

Frames of Power: Visual Narrative of Black Love, Legacy Leadership

Photo Ethnography



Reframing the Archive: Photo-Ethnography, Black Feminist Epistemologies, and the Visual Genealogies of Diaspora.

Introduction

Within this thesis, photo-ethnography is used as an embodied methodological tool for reclaiming the geographies, memory, connectivity, and resistance of my Black female Jamaican heritage and British identity lived experiences. It encapsulates moments, people, places, and material culture that have shaped my life history and becoming. As a method rooted in Black feminist thought, it challenges dominant epistemologies that have historically devalued sensory, embodied, and visual ways of knowing (Campt, 2017, p. 34). These dominant frameworks often render the narratives of Black women, mothers, and communities invisible or misrepresented, reinforcing the hegemony of text-based epistemologies while neglecting the affective, spatial, and sonic dimensions of Black lived experience.

This visual method is positioned to capture the embodied, affective, and spatial dimensions of Black Jamaican heritage and British-born women's lives as BFCEMs in ways that traditional archives and dominant historiographies fail to do. The inclusion of photography, when integrated with sound, storytelling, and embodied practice, as part of the larger Diasporic Embodied Praxis Methodology, offers a holistic representation of BFCEMs economic agency, cultural production, and intergenerational legacy. Through this visual and sonic approach, BFCEMs of Jamaican heritage are positioned as central architects of their own histories, challenging archival silences and affirming the role of creative entrepreneurship in Black women's structural navigation and self-defined success. By moving beyond text-based ethnographic inquiry, photo-ethnography breathes life into this thesis, adding a dynamic and multi-sensory element that allows those with similar experiences to see, remember, and relate, while offering outsiders a portal into narratives that are too often marginalised or erased.

However, photo-ethnography is not merely employed as a methodological tool; it is a radical act of epistemic resistance, a challenge to the exclusionary logic of institutional archives and colonialist historiographies. This chapter positions photo-ethnography within transatlantic

Black women's geographies (McKittrick, 2006) and counter-archival resistance (Hartman, 2019), arguing that photography is not passive documentation but an intervention that reclaims spatial, historical, and affective realities erased or distorted by dominant narratives. Through this method, Black women's creative, economic, and cultural labour is made visible as a central force in shaping diasporic histories.

Building on Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation" (2019) and Tina Camp's "listening to images" (2017), this chapter situates photo-ethnography as an embodied and speculative praxis. It not only represents BFCEMs life journey, including previous generations and how their journey laid the foundation, and also reconfigures sites of memory, resistance, and visibility. By attending to photography as an affective medium, one that resonates through gestures, expressions, and intergenerational visual storytelling, this approach affirms BFCEMs roles as cultural theorists, historians, and visual griots of the diaspora. It recognises the interplay of migration, entrepreneurship, family, love, connectivity and creative expression as foundational to BFCEMs positionality, mobility, and resilience. Ultimately, photo-ethnography becomes more than a method of documentation; it is an act of reclamation, restoring visibility, dignity, and power to the narratives of Black women who have long been omitted from dominant histories.

Visual Narratives of Resistance: Photo-Ethnography, Black Women's Creative Entrepreneurship, and Diasporic Identity Formation

The curation of family and personal photos in this photo-ethnography and subsequently throughout phase 2 (Ethnomusicology) and phase 3 (Autoethnography) validates images as a critical source of knowledge, presenting a visual narrative that encapsulates emotions, gestures, and intergenerational memory. In alignment with sensory ethnography, it reveals how Black women's (in this case, Black women of Jamaican heritage) lived experiences are inscribed through the body, space, and material culture, offering a layered understanding of the mindsets, values, principles, and behaviours that shape the journey of becoming. Building upon Camp's concept of "listening to images," this approach underscores the affective power of photographs, demonstrating how they allow us to access histories and experiences that exist beyond the written word.

This method is particularly effective in answering RQ 1-3 as it illuminates the systemic and socio-cultural challenges that shape Black girls', women's, and mothers' engagement with creative entrepreneurship. By visually documenting the constraints of traditional employment, the pressures of racialised and gendered labour across generations and the necessity of self-reliance, these images make tangible the forces that propel Black women

and wider Black communities into creative industries as a means of survival and self-definition. The photographs serve as a Hartmanian counter archive, revealing the limitations of dominant narratives while offering alternative testimonies that foreground agency, resilience, and strategic adaptability.

In conversation with other BFCEM, one stated:

“Looking back at family photos, especially with loved ones, breathed new life into the untold stories of my parents and grandparents. Some of these stories inspired me, while others revealed pieces of our history I had never known. As a child, I was always excited to flip through our family albums, but now, with age, I see them differently. Each image marks a moment of resilience, sacrifice, and triumph, showing me how each generation laid the foundation for the opportunities I have today. What once felt like simple snapshots now serve as powerful reminders of our progress, our strength, and the legacy we continue to build.” (BFCEM, 50, London)

Further, the use of photo-ethnography deepens the exploration of how BFCEMs of Jamaican descent navigate transatlantic socio-political structures to achieve positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment. By capturing moments of work, family, and community engagement, the images document how cultural heritage, migration histories, and diasporic ties inform professional and personal trajectories. The method enables an embodied engagement with space, highlighting how not only Black women but generations of Black Communities negotiate economic precarity and systemic exclusion while building sustainable creative enterprises. Through curated visual narratives, the affective weight of intergenerational knowledge becomes evident, illustrating how familial and cultural inheritance inform entrepreneurial practice and decision-making.

There was a consensus amongst the BFCEM’s I spoke with that;

“Looking at our family photos, we saw more than just faces; we saw the journey of migration, sacrifice, and resilience that shaped my British and Jamaican identities. Each image told a story of adaptation and ambition, from our grandparents’ lives in Jamaica to the struggles and triumphs of building a life in Britain. The photographs captured the nuances of our existence, from humble beginnings where traditions were preserved and cultural pride was carried across oceans, and how every generation fought for more than the last. They remind us that my upward mobility, empowerment, and sense of positionality are not just personal achievements, but a continuation of our ancestors’ dreams, etched into every frame.” (BFCE, 35, Birmingham)

Hip-hop's influence on identity formation, creative entrepreneurship, and socio-political engagement is also made visible through this approach. The aesthetic and cultural signifiers within the images, across this phase of photo ethnography and those integrated into the ethnographic and autoethnographic phases, reveal how hip-hop serves as a site of empowerment, resistance, and self-definition for BFCEMs. Photographs of performance, style, branding, and everyday lived experiences articulate Hip-Hop's role in shaping business strategies, storytelling techniques, and modes of self-representation. By attending to the visual and material dimensions of hip-hop culture, the photo ethnographic method captures how BFCEMs harness their ethos to construct narratives of power, visibility, and economic self-determination. In alignment with Camp's concept of 'listening to images,' these photographs do more than depict; they resonate, evoking the rhythms, gestures, and embodied knowledge that connect Black women's creative and entrepreneurial practices.

In conversation with other BFCEM, we remembered fashion influences, laughed at old pictures and reflected on how we were influenced sonically and visually.

One BFCEM reflected in saying.

"Hip Hop allowed me to occupy a space that felt authentic, a space where I could mould and create a version of myself that felt true to who I was. In a world that often dictated how Black women should look, speak, and move, Hip Hop gave me options. At first, it was difficult to resist the pressures of defaulting to the oversexualised archetypes that mainstream narratives pushed, but then I saw women who were bold, outspoken, and unapologetically themselves. Through their lyrics, their presence, and their defiance, I found the confidence to carve my own path, not just in identity but in entrepreneurship and social engagement. Hip Hop was more than music; it was a blueprint for self-definition, a space to challenge norms, build community, and turn creativity into economic power." (BFCE, 45, Birmingham)

Ultimately, this multifaceted approach addresses the gaps and silences in traditional archives by positioning Black women's creative and entrepreneurial lives as central to a broader understanding of cultural production, resilience, and structural navigation. It affirms photography as a means of knowledge production, illuminating the intersections of race, gender, creativity, and economic agency through an analytical framework that values presence, resistance, and survival, while also demonstrating how it brings new layers of life when interconnected with sound and storytelling, offering a holistic embodiment of BFCEMs of Jamaican Heritage lives and experiences.

Transatlantic Diasporic Black Feminist Epistemology: Re-Memory, Archival Refusal, and the Visual Reclamation of Black Women's Histories

By integrating the TDBFE and the DEP, photo-ethnography extends beyond representation to become a site of critical re-memory, cultural re-mapping, and archival refusal. TDBFE insists on centring Black women's lived experiences across geographies, histories, and creative spaces, while DEP foregrounds embodiment, performance, and intergenerational memory as vital knowledge systems.

Employing photo-ethnography as a core methodology enables an overstanding, a deeper, embodied knowledge (Nyamekye, 2021), of Black visual genealogies. This is vital in tracing Windrush-era presences and their cultural resistance strategies. Aesthetic political expressions in Rastafarianism, Black music, and diasporic movements link past and present struggles for belonging. Kinship practices, other-mothering, intergenerational care, and love, underscore how family networks scaffold identity, mobility, and resistance in diasporic life worlds.

Within this broader methodological framework, photo-ethnography affirms the legitimacy of visual and embodied knowledge as critical epistemologies of Black life. This includes the intricate intersections of race, gender, and geography, building on Stephanie Camp's (2004) notion of rival geographies and Katherine McKittrick's (2006) conceptualisation of Black women's geographies.

In contrast to the historically extractive nature of ethnographic research, this work builds upon Black feminist epistemologies (Collins, 2000) by embracing participatory knowledge production. It draws on Caswell's (2021) emphasis on co-authorship and aligns with Shange's (2019) praxis of ethical refusal, positioning Black women as collaborators rather than subjects. This reinforces a relational, embodied, and situated knowledge system that challenges dominant archival logics and centres Black women's visual and sonic narratives in knowledge production.

Conclusion: Re-Mapping Knowledge, Reclaiming Futures

Photo-ethnography, when integrated with TDBFE and DEP, transcends the boundaries of traditional representation to become an act of epistemic resistance, cultural reclamation, and strategic world-building. It dismantles colonial hierarchies of knowledge by privileging the interplay of visual, sonic, and embodied epistemologies, affirming BFCEMs not as subjects of study but as archivists, theorists, and griots of the diaspora. Through this methodology,

BFCEMs of Jamaican heritage assert their agency as architects of their own histories, disrupting the silences imposed by colonial archives.

This method challenges extractive research models, reconfiguring ethnographic inquiry as a participatory, multimodal, and counter-archival praxis. Unlike traditional ethnography, which often prioritises text-based documentation, the photo-ethnography employed re-maps memory through imagery, movement, and sound, offering a deeper, affective engagement with lived realities. It does not merely reconstruct an erased past, it actively shapes new futures by making BFCEMs economic, creative, and social strategies visible in ways that textual analysis alone cannot capture.

As a transformative decolonial approach, this photo-ethnography refuses to be constrained by the linear, static conventions of the archive. Instead, it constructs living, breathing, participatory archives that challenge dominant historical narratives. It expands the scope of ethnographic inquiry, allowing researchers to trace histories, identities, and socio-economic strategies in ways that are both analytical and sensorial. By treating photography, gesture, spatiality, and performance as primary sites of knowledge production, this element of the DEP methodology affirms that what is felt, seen, and embodied is just as intellectually rigorous as what is written and spoken.

Ultimately, photo-ethnography within a TDBFE and DEP framework is not just a research method, it is an act of epistemic justice, self-authorship, and radical futurity. It asserts that Black women's ways of knowing are not only valid but essential to decolonial scholarship, interdisciplinary inquiry, and the broader intellectual landscape. In doing so, it offers a blueprint for reclaiming narratives, resisting erasure, and reimagining the very foundations of knowledge production.

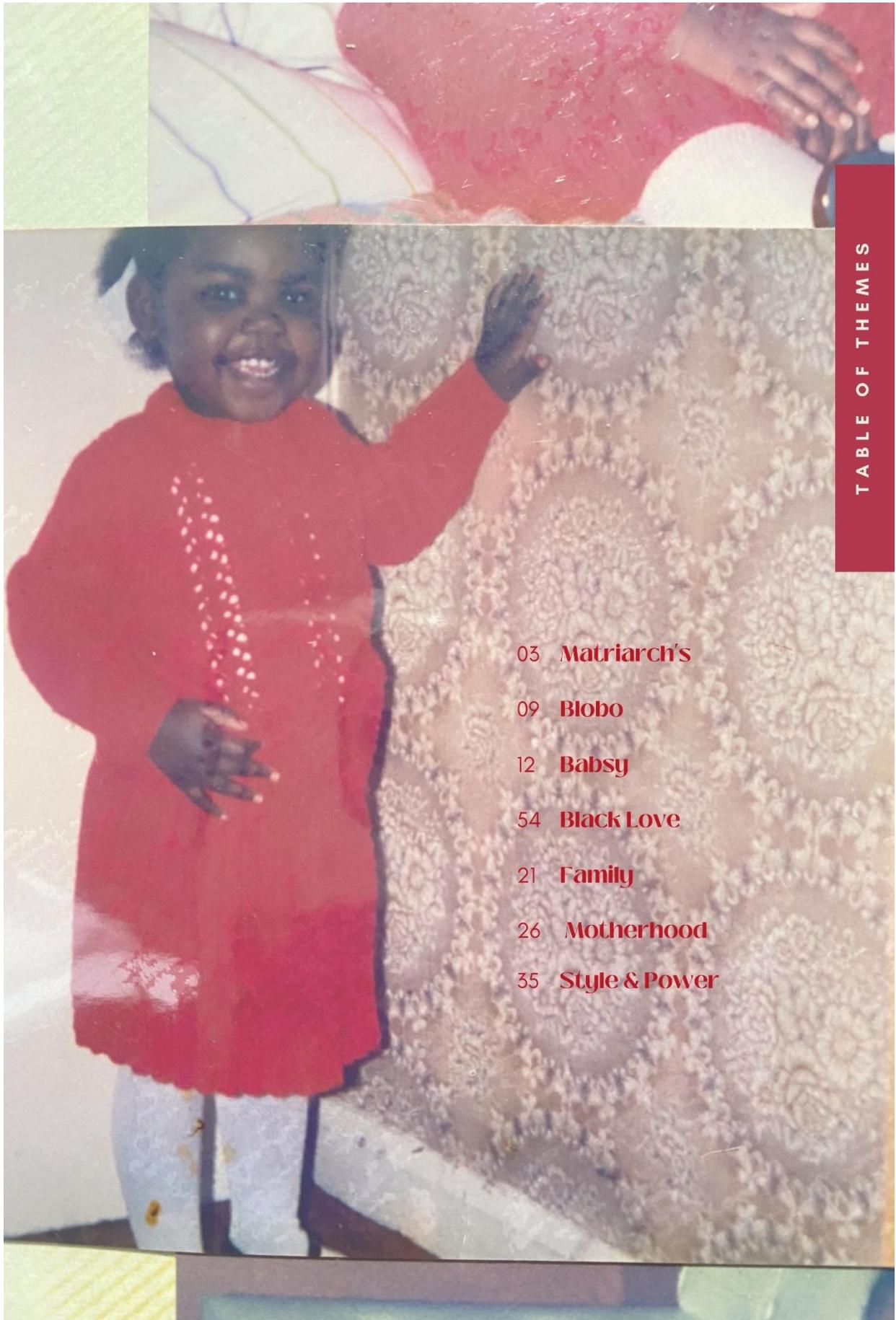
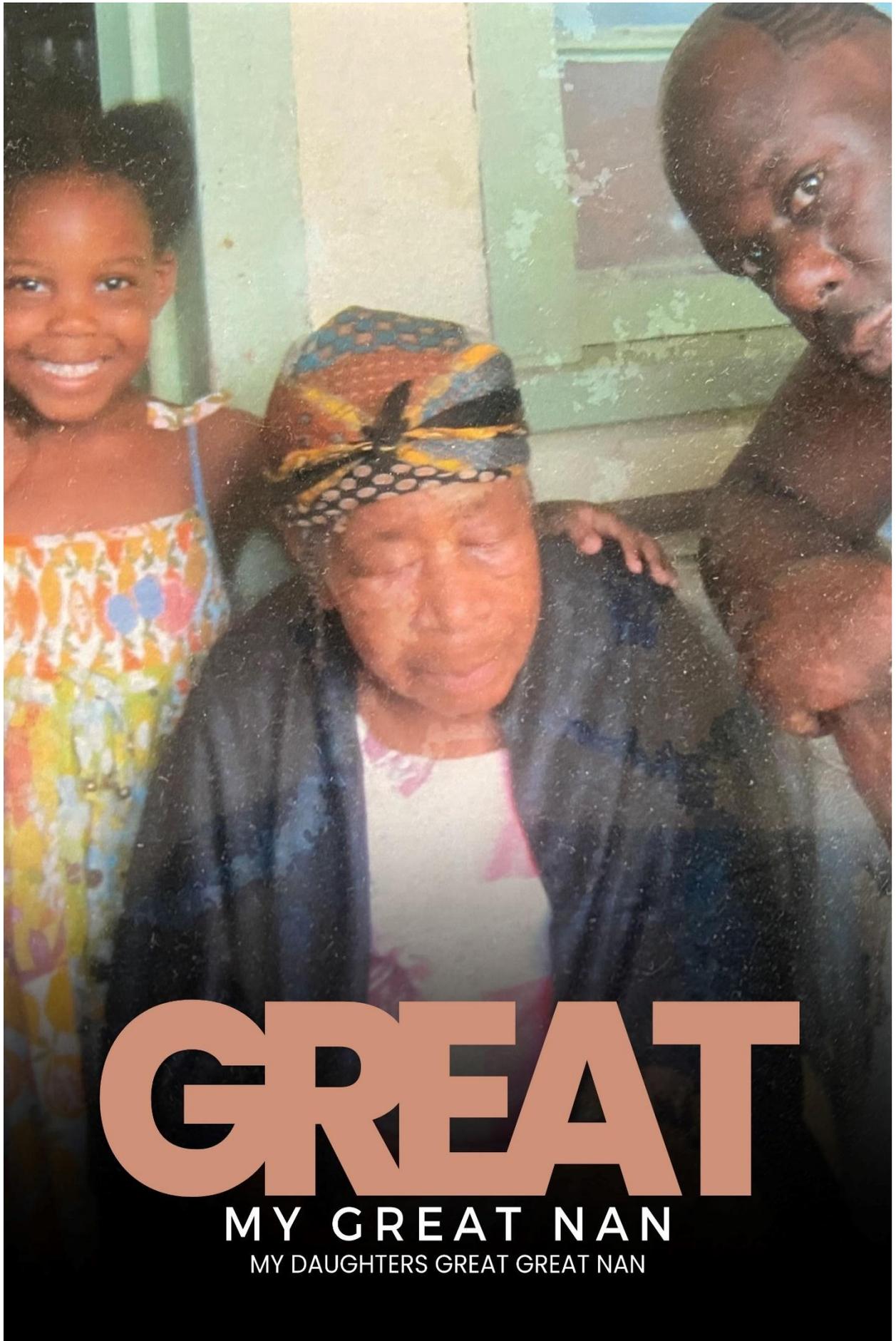


TABLE OF THEMES

03 **Matriarch's**
09 **Blobo**
12 **Babsy**
54 **Black Love**
21 **Family**
26 **Motherhood**
35 **Style & Power**



GREAT

MY GREAT NAN
MY DAUGHTERS GREAT GREAT NAN



1983

MATRIARCHS

LEADING LADIES

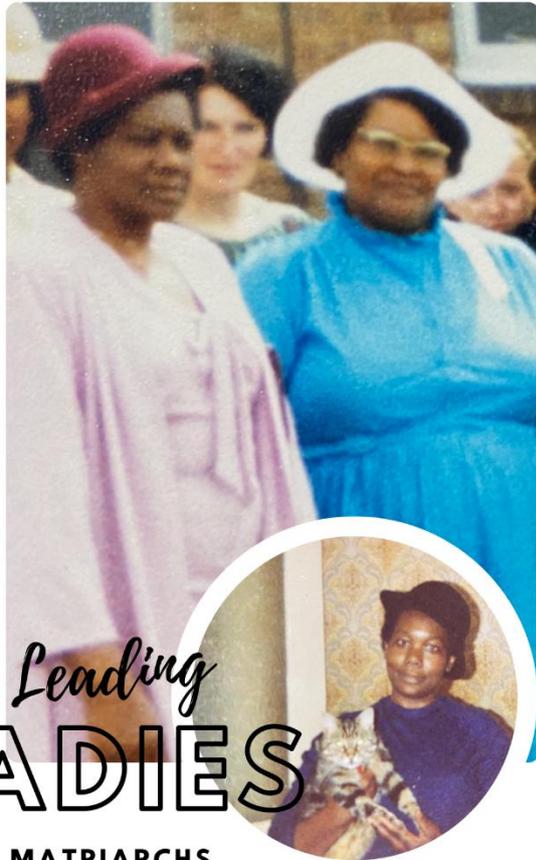
NANNY MCCALLA NANNY ATKINSON

Leading Ladies

MATRIARCHS

Matriarch: an older woman who is powerful within a family or organisation.

At the heart of my life are two women who took a bold leap of faith, following their husbands to unfamiliar lands, and leaving their children behind with loved ones in the hope of building a better future before returning home. This complex narrative is all too familiar in Caribbean (Jamaican) households, a story of sacrifice and longing that, in hindsight, did not unfold as they had once envisioned. My grandmothers, Nanny McCalla (Wynter) and Nanny Atkinson had dreams and aspirations of their own, but in the name of love, family, and opportunity, they made the difficult decision to leave behind the sun-soaked beauty of Jamaica, the vibrant culture, the food, the respect, the happiness, and the familiar struggles they had always known. In 1962, they arrived in England, only to be met with cold weather, grey skies, unfamiliar food, racism, and a harsh reality that demanded a new level of resilience, hope, and the strength of a familiar community to help them cling to whatever fragments of their dreams they could still hold onto.



Leading LADIES

MATRIARCHS

Both my Nanny McCalla (Wynter) and Nanny Atkinson worked as domestics at Dudley Road Hospital (now City Hospital) in Birmingham. Little did they know that their shared experiences would one day intertwine in a deeper way, as they would become united by their love for a grandchild, me.

A posed Family picture (cropped) Taken at my christening, in 1983, to the left in purple in Nanny McCalla and to the right in Blue in Nanny Atkinson (Wynter and Jack Maiden names)





MOLDING THE FUTURE THROUGH GENERATIONS

REFLECTIONS ON THE MATRIARCHS OF MY FAMILY



AUNTY DASSA AND NANNY MCCALLA



Well-groomed and dressed in their Sunday best, my nans represented a distinct era of Jamaican women, full-figured, demure in style, yet undeniably powerful Black women. They were bonded not only by their love for their children, who were in a relationship but also by their shared love for me. At that moment, my existence became the centre of their affection and a symbol of their union. I have chosen to begin with images of my great-nan and both nans, as they lay the foundation for a broader conversation about what femininity, womanhood, and motherhood mean to me. Their lives reflect the deep sacrifices women make in the name of love and family, embodying what it truly takes to pursue family advancement at the cost of their own dreams.

The picture of my nans captures a pivotal moment of transition into a new life after migration, within expanding families and the birth of additional children in England. Both women were left to lead their families after their husbands, my grandfathers, passed away while I was still young. Although my memories of them are few, what stands out most is the deep sense of love, trust, and respect I felt for my nans. To me, they were like bonus parents, guiding our family with strength and care through the challenges they faced along the way.



WISDOM OF THE PAST SHAPES THE VISION OF THE FUTURE



Finding this image in 2022, 39 years after it was taken was the first time, I had seen both of my Nans together in one place. Before it I had not thought about it very much as Nanny Atkinson died when I was 8 and I had grown up with Nanny McCalla (Wynter as I call her) my entire life, she has always been at the core of my life.

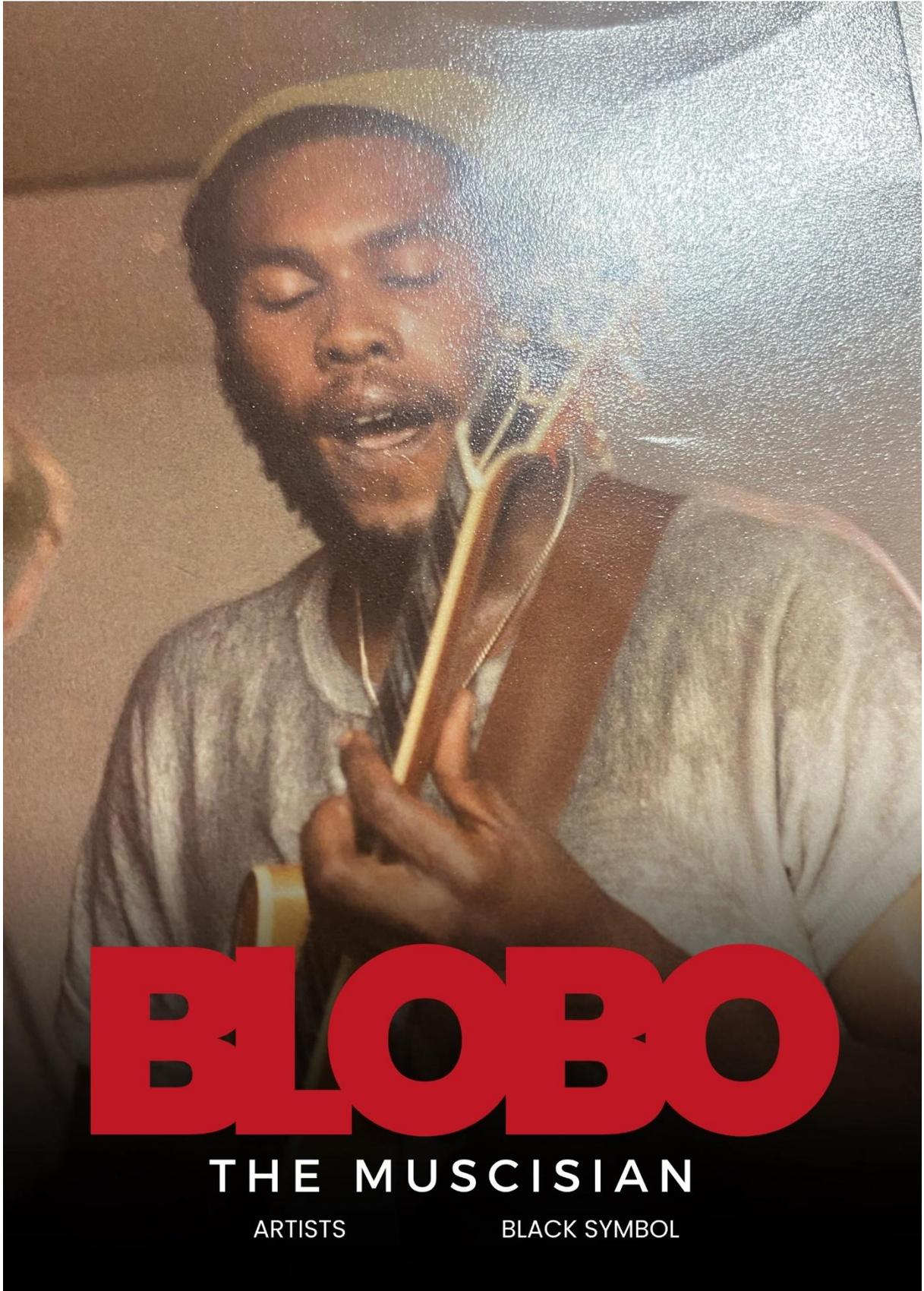
Her maiden name is Wynter and that's probably the reason she thinks I call her that, but it is not.

Growing up one of my favourite fictional characters was Wynter from the *"Coldest winter ever"* written by Sister Souljah (1999), her audacity to be brave take risks, talk straight were traits I admired and that reminded me of my nan, it was fait that had it that their names were the same and it stuck.

I experienced a moment of joy in seeing this as it also confirmed vague memories I had from early childhood around the love in my family, but it also brought a rush of tears to my eyes when I reflected on how much I still did not know. In the images on this page, you see Nanny McCalla with my daughter, and my niece as she continues to be the matriarch and epicentre of our family.







The Beginning

THE MUSCIAN

Music as a first love and a love language

Music was the heartbeat of my dad's life. His journey with his brothers and close friends in the band "Black Symbol" was at the core of who he was. I explore this in more detail in the "I am my father's daughter" autoethnographic chapter. They played at festivals, and gigs, and travelled widely, becoming a well-renowned group. Music wasn't just a passion for him, it was his love language, his first love. Although I didn't witness this part of his life directly, as I was just a baby, I experienced it through old photos, posters, and stories shared by my friends' parents. Occasionally, I'd watch him play the guitar, catching glimpses of the musical world that shaped him. Despite not being present for those early years, music became a connectivity and foundation of our bond, organic, exciting, and joyful. It was through this connection that I was inspired to start writing poetry at the age of 10, drawn to the same creative spirit that guided him.



Black
SYMBOL
THE BAND

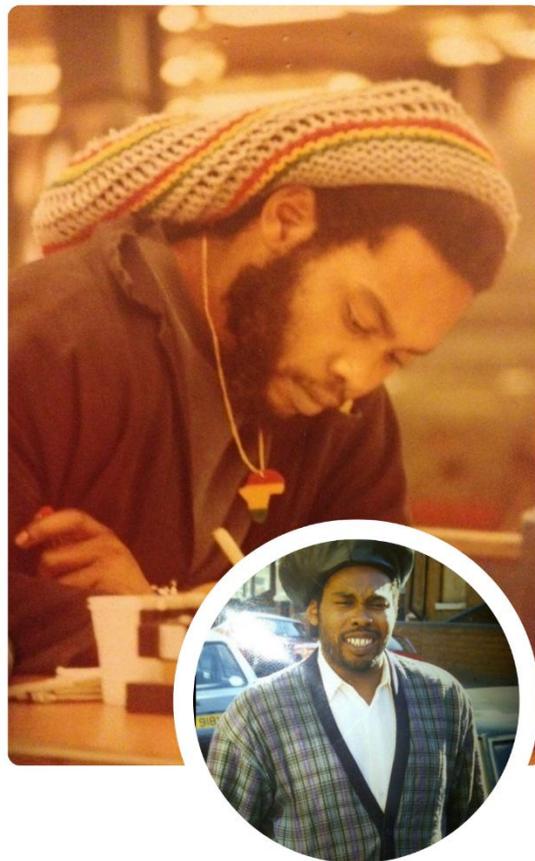
The Beginning

THE DREAMER

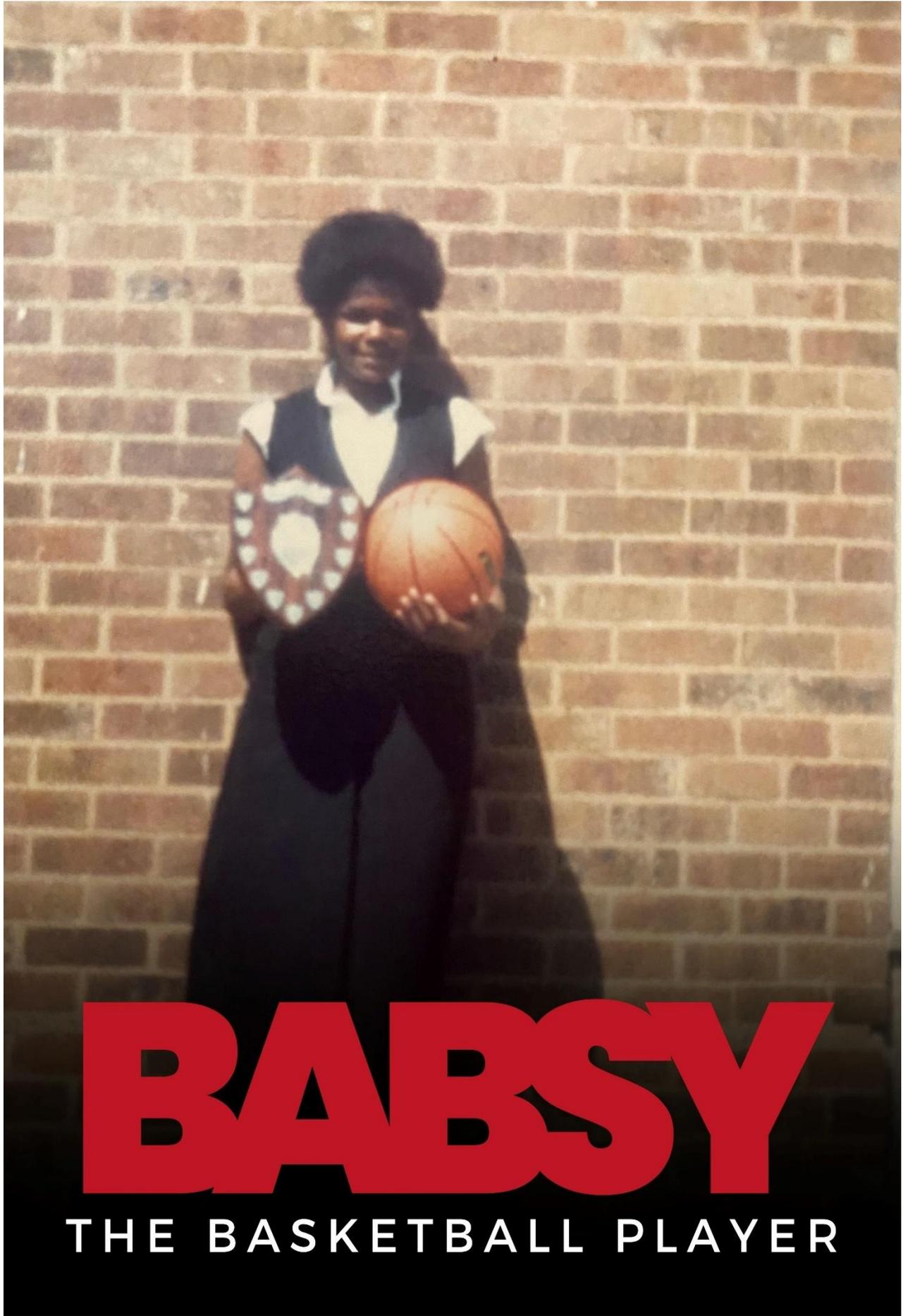
Our audacity to dream and then do the work required challenges is what changes our lives.

Driven by a deep passion for the Black community, a strong sense of pride, and his roots in Handsworth, Birmingham, my dad immersed himself in local Black community organisations like Harambee and frequently volunteering at the Marcus Garvey Building Project, dedicating his time and energy to uplifting those around him.

Beyond his commitment to the community, my dad had a "romance" with the written word. His handwriting was flamboyant and distinctive using calligraphy, a reflection of his expressive nature. He wielded words masterfully, both in speech and in writing, and was known for his articulate and thoughtful expression. One of his friends often referenced a line from a Johnny Nash song—"There are more questions than answers" because my dad was always questioning the answers. Now, I see where I get that trait. He would debate any topic with unrelenting curiosity, never satisfied until he had explored every angle.



In his early years, my dad aspired to become a mechanic and actively worked toward that career. However, God had a different plan for him, one deeply rooted in his passion for uplifting the community through knowledge and education. This shift in purpose led him to pursue higher education, graduate from Warwick University, and become a defence lawyer. Sadly, by the time he achieved this milestone, Nanny Atkinson, his greatest motivation, had already passed away. But her memory remained his driving force, and everything he accomplished was to honour her and make her proud.



BABSY

THE BASKETBALL PLAYER

The Beginning

THE DREAMER

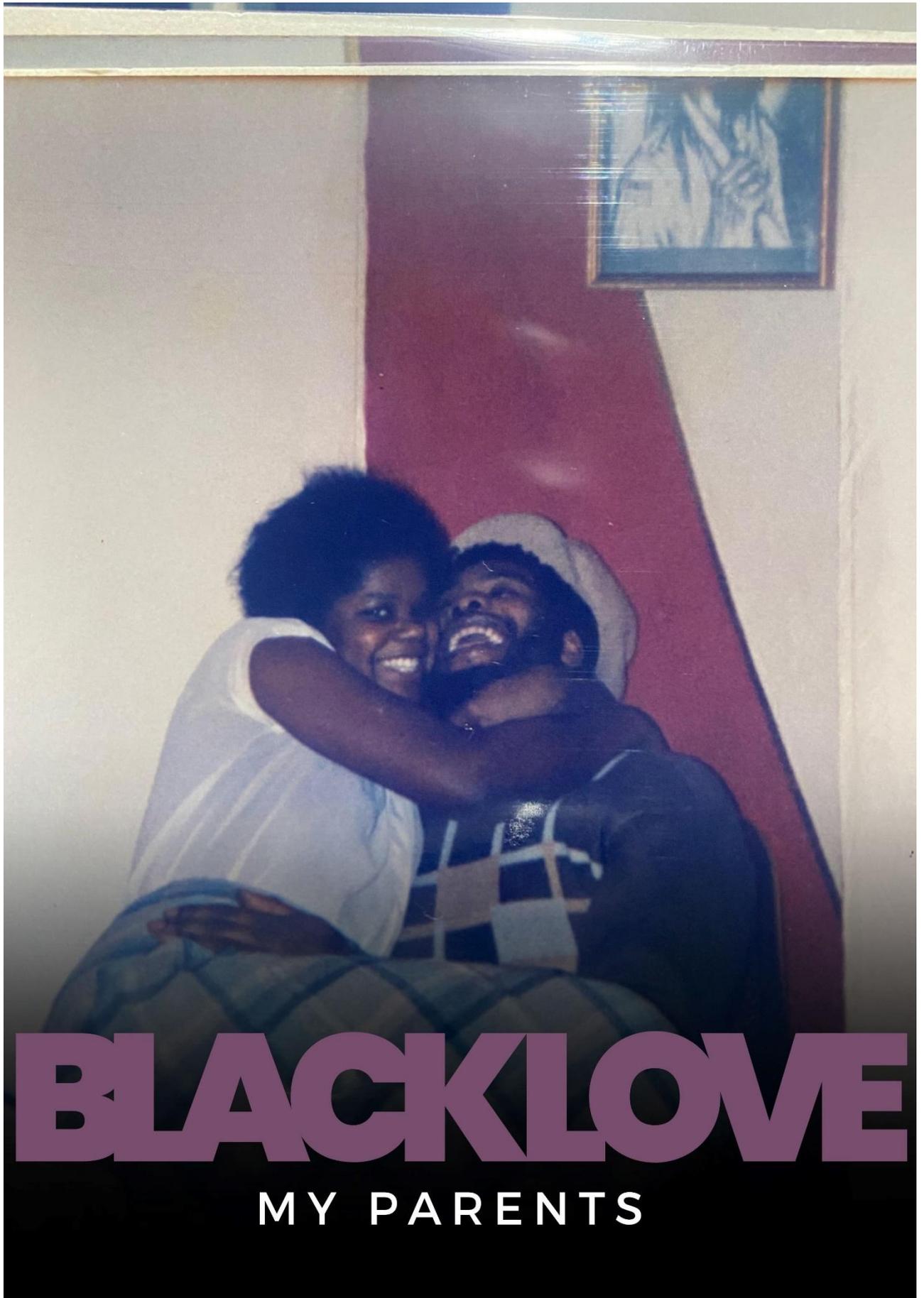
As a young woman, it is important to protect your dreams.

My mum is naturally shy, often keeping her thoughts to herself and speaking little. Like my dad, she came from humble beginnings, and she also harboured big dreams, of becoming an architect.

I once spoke with her about this, and she shared a memory that broke my heart. During her school years, in the 1970s in England, she met with a career advisor to discuss her ambitions. When she expressed her desire to become an architect, her dream was dismissed outright. The advisor told her that architecture wasn't a job for a woman, especially not a Black woman, and advised her instead to pursue a more "suitable" career, like administration. They told her to stay in her lane and not be overly ambitious.



My mum became an administrator, spending my entire life working between Black organisations and academic institutions. She steadily worked her way up, excelling in her field and earning respect for her dedication and skill. But sometimes, I can't help but wonder if, deep down, she regrets believing the words of someone who now holds no significance in her reality. A person whose name she doesn't even remember, yet whose words shaped the course of her life. This would stick with me and shape my own approach to protecting my dreams.



BLACKLOVE

MY PARENTS

The Beginning

BLACK LOVE

Black Love is affectionate, caring, passionate, strong, difficult, painful, cherished. Black love has sustained the test of time.

On March 2nd, 2014, during a meal celebrating my mum's 50th birthday, I heard for the first time the story of how my parents met. As I listened, it struck me that I had never even thought to ask about it before. In some way, I had always taken their union for granted, as if it had always been, an unchanging truth, the only reality I had ever known.

The earliest picture of them together was taken outside our first family home, not far from either of their parents' houses. I remember this because we could walk to Nanny McCalla's, and Nanny Atkinson's was just a short drive away. At that time, my dad had a Jaguar and my mum an Escort. My memories from those early days are filled with nothing but love and joy.



Black
LOVE

PARENTS

As a child, I was full of confidence, believing I could be anything I wanted to be. Little did I know that, by society's standards, I lived in a "poor" neighbourhood, with young parents who were still finding their way. At that time, my dad was working as an engineer and my mum was an administrator we were lower class. But none of that mattered to me then, I felt limitless in my own world.

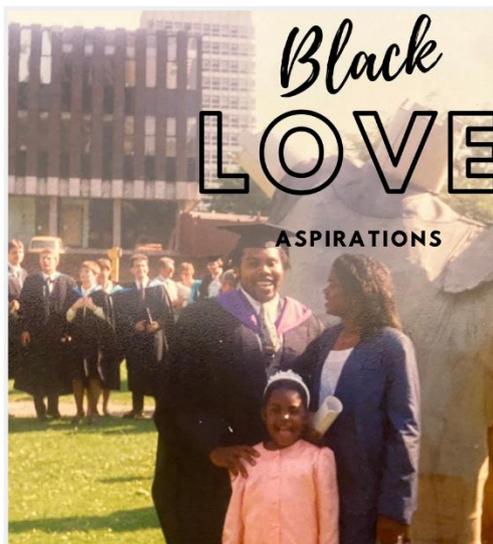
Aspiration

BLACK LOVE

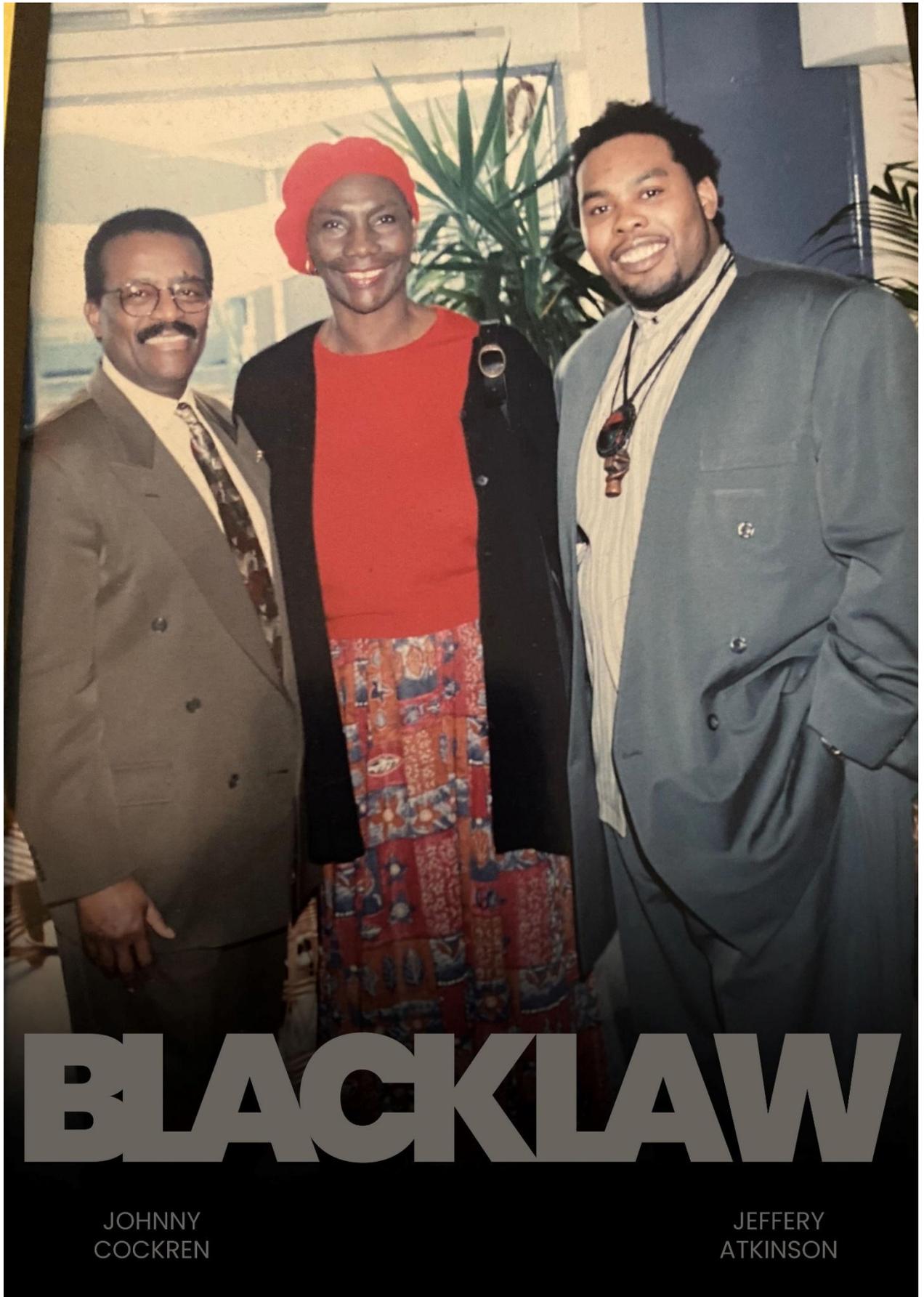
Black Love is a demonstration of commitment, partnership and sacrifice to achieve aspirations that contribute to a strong foundation.

Ambition, teamwork, love, and commitment allowed my parents to grow together as equals. Looking back now, I realise how much I took for granted. Both were university graduates, my dad from Warwick University and my mum from Birmingham University. As a young girl, I witnessed their achievements, unaware of the profound impact they would have on shaping my own path.

Growing up, I attended an afterschool club, walking from my local school to the play centre until my parents finished work and came to pick me up. During summer holidays, I stayed with my nan, competed briefly in trampolining, roller skated, went on family coach trips, and participated in summer schemes. My parents always encouraged me to explore and experiment, nurturing my imagination, creativity, love of travel, and competitive spirit. From an early age, I was given everything I needed to thrive, and I never experienced a sense of lack.



I played with friends, but I was never the kind of child who needed them. I was perfectly content playing school with my dolls and teddy bears, writing stories, and talking to myself. Looking back, I wonder if my parents realised they were nurturing my independence all along. Did they ever consider the person I was becoming as I quietly observed their every move? Were they aware that their love for each other was my safe haven, the foundation upon which I would later build my own expectations of life and relationships?



JOHNNY
COCKREN

JEFFERY
ATKINSON

Adventure

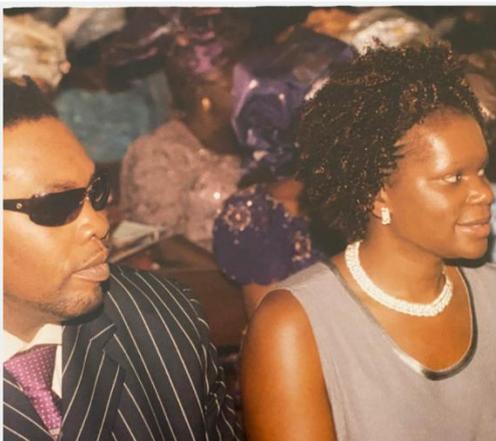
BLACK LOVE

Black Love includes building together, ambition, joint vision, growth and adventure.

The three photos here are from Jamaica, Florida, and Nigeria. A central part of my parents' relationship was their shared love for travel and their ability to explore the world together, first as a couple, then with me, my sister, and later, my daughter.

Growing up in a household where travel was valued as a crucial part of learning and personal development was an incredible gift. It allowed me to see life's possibilities through a global lens. From an early age, my mind was opened to the diverse social, political, economic, and cultural landscapes of the world. My parents helped us understand that, as Black women, we could forge new paths and create lives beyond the borders of England.

Throughout my life, they travelled individually, as a couple, and as a family, visiting destinations across Europe, the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean, Africa, the USA, Brazil, and Cuba. For us, travel wasn't just a luxury; it was a way to expand our horizons and imagine a world filled with greater possibilities.



From an early age and well into my twenties, I developed a deep affection for the USA, with many of my aspirations taking root in New York. Travel played a pivotal role in shaping our family conversations, as my dad emphasized the importance of seeking diverse perspectives and understanding the world through a global lens. He encouraged us to think critically and engage with the world beyond our immediate surroundings.

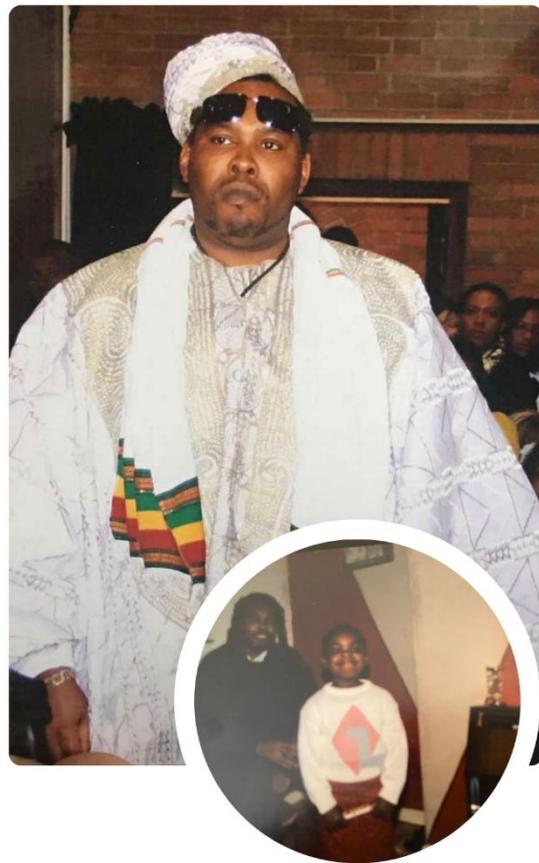
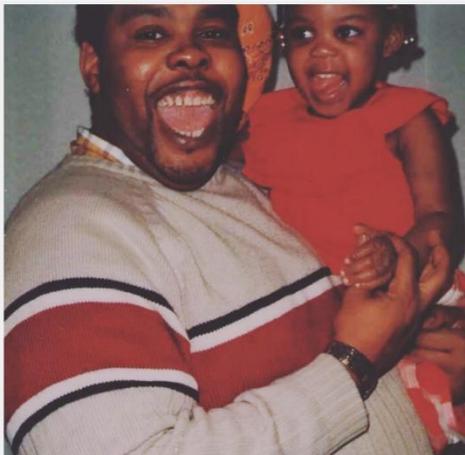
Leadership

BLACK LOVE

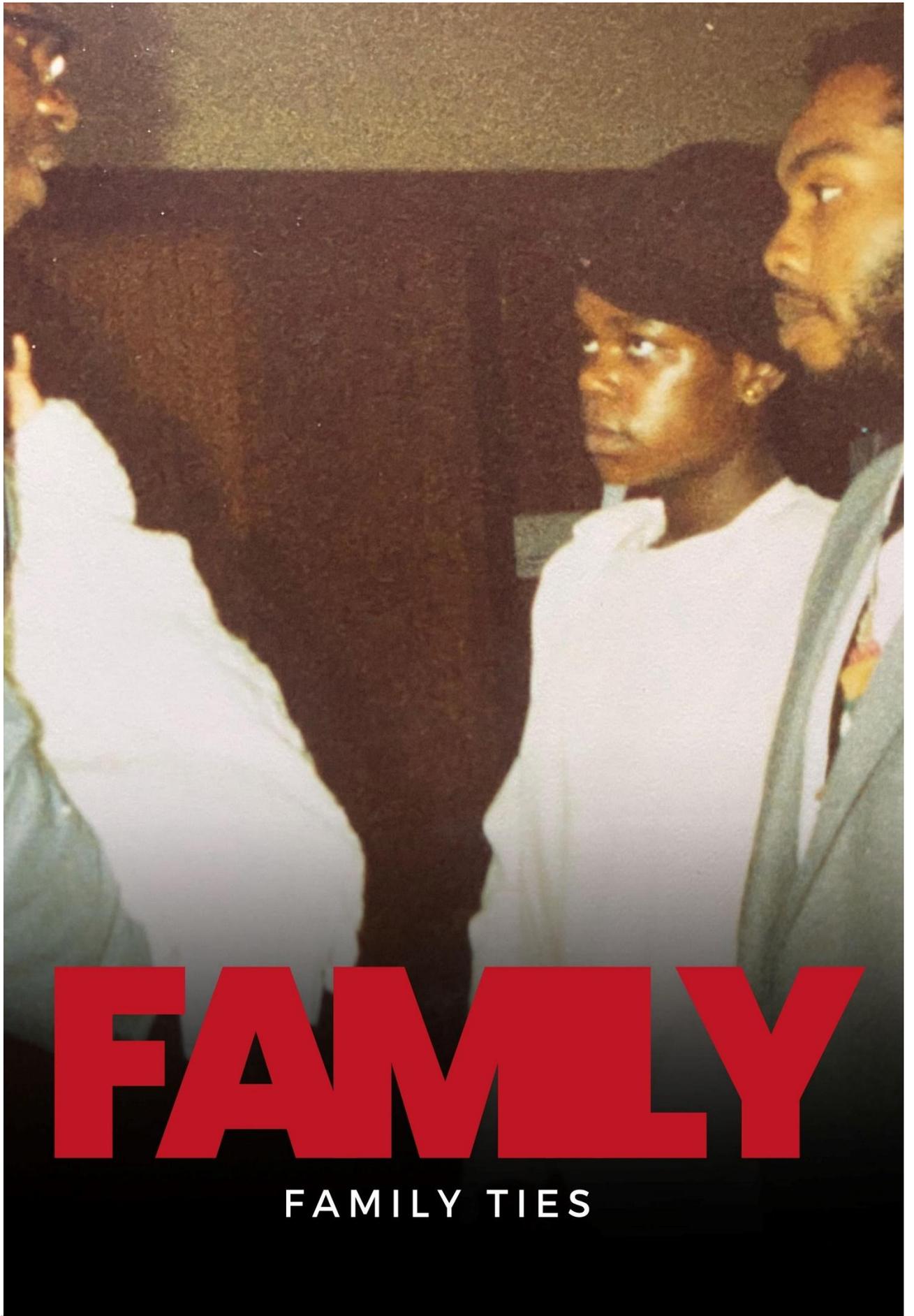
Black Love is continuous strength, a listening ear, a support system, nurturing and leadership. Black Love is a fathers love.

The curated images in this collection portray a profound display of strength and leadership through the lens of Black fatherhood, showcasing my dad as a father, grandfather, and leader. The first image shows him in traditional African attire, walking to the podium to deliver a eulogy at my uncle's funeral, the first of his siblings to pass. The gravity of leadership in the midst of grief is palpable, capturing not only his solemn energy but also the immense responsibility he carried during such a difficult moment. I vividly remember sitting quietly, watching the crowd stand in awe of his presence, feeling my own deep admiration.

Growing up, I was and still am a daddy's girl. The second image captures the trust, joy, and confidence I felt from an early age, knowing my dad always had my back, no matter what. My childhood was filled with unwavering love and support; I had everything I could ever need, and more. When I became a mother to my daughter, his first and only grandchild at the time, his love and devotion remained as constant and steadfast as ever.



I witnessed that same joy and confidence being instilled in my daughter. Watching my dad nurture her spirit, allowing her to smile with a heart full of love, and being a constant source of joy and safety for her was more than I could have ever hoped for. His presence in her life was a beautiful extension of the love and support he had always given me.



Family

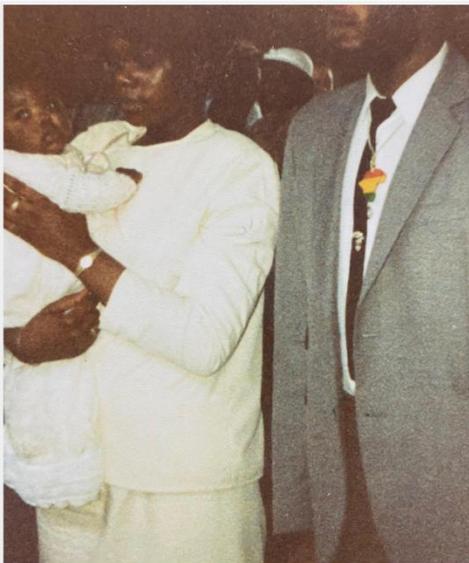
BOUND IN LOVE

Black Love is a foundation of which to build and cultivate a family united in both the spirit and the flesh for eternity.

A christening, a blessing, my christening, my blessing. This was the moment my parents chose to spiritually protect and honor the gift they had received from God. My name, Nathania, means "God has given" or "Gift from God."

These photos capture a beautiful simplicity, a moment of innocence, unaware of the journey that lay ahead for everyone in the picture and those connected to us.

Throughout my life, God, spirituality, and faith have always been central, a constant reminder that there is more to our existence than what we experience in the physical world. This belief has been a guiding force in my journey, knowing that I am a gift from God, with a purpose to fulfill.



GOD HAS GIVEN

NATHANIA

Leadership

BOUND IN LOVE

Black Love is unfiltered honesty, laughter, protection, memories, trust, and overcoming challenges.

My dad was the leader of our family, and to my sister and me, he was our hero. When I had my daughter, he naturally became her hero too. These pictures represent how, from an early age, my dad instilled confidence, joy, and strength in us, shaping not only who we were but also who we would become.

In the first picture, it's just me and my dad in our first family home, and you can see the happiness and confidence radiating from me. At that time, being with him was all I needed. When I reflect on that period, I remember school and after-school activities, but my greatest joy was always being at home, where I felt safe, loved, and cherished.

The bond between my daughter and my dad was equally special. He was not just her granddad but also a father figure. He shared his talents, nurtured her confidence, and provided a safe space where love and strength flowed naturally. Through his unwavering love, he gave her the strength to thrive.



The picture of me and my mum is one of the few we have together. On this particular night, a magazine I contributed to was launching, and I had choreographed and co-directed the fashion show that took place. It was a special moment, as my mum finally got to see firsthand what I had been working on, a glimpse into what was an unconventional but deeply fulfilling journey. It was a night filled with joy and pride, as she began to witness the direction my path was taking.

Joy

BOUND IN LOVE

Black Love is accepting our differences, laughing & enjoying our weird and wonderful interactions while being there for each other.

One thing about my family is that we are never short on numbers. From my dad's side alone, there are at least 45 of us, not to mention the extended family we grew up with, second cousins who feel more like siblings. On my mum's side, there are 8 of us, and when you add our children into the mix, family gatherings quickly turn into full-blown parties. And I wouldn't change it for the world. Growing up surrounded by so many personalities and lifestyles shaped my character, preparing me for the outside world in ways I never could have imagined.

One thing that remains constant, especially on my dad's side, is that no matter how much we fight, disagree, or fall out, our love, laughter, and shared craziness always bring us back together. These bonds continue to grow, despite the ups and downs. Being part of a male-dominated family, with only a few women, meant that confidence and the ability to speak up were essential skills I had to develop early on.



For my daughter to experience this has been such a blessing. My male cousins, whom she considers her uncles, have formed strong bonds with her. They've been there for both of us since the day she was born, spending weekends or evenings with us, sharing meals, hanging out at our home, driving us around before I had a car, the list is endless. Their support and presence have been invaluable, creating a sense of family that has enriched her life in so many ways.

Trust

BOUND IN FAMILY

Black Love is Black women supporting and loving each other even in their hardest moments so that they can stand tall together.

Assured women are at the heart of my family; everywhere you look, there's a woman with a complex story of survival, hope, success, faith, and the pursuit of happiness.

As the oldest grandchild on my mum's side, I have taken on the personal responsibility of becoming a role model for the next generation of female leaders. While I haven't always felt like the best representation of that ideal, I continually strive to embody elegance, grace, and success.

On my dad's side of the family, I find myself in a unique position. I am one of the youngest in the first set of grandchildren but also the oldest in the second set. This dynamic means there are already women before me who have invaluable wisdom to share, allowing me to navigate some of life's challenges with their insight. I have women with whom I can figure things out, share laughter, and shed tears building a rich tapestry of support and connection.



Big Bad & Heavy

Trust

BOUND IN FAMILY

Black Love is the laughter, joy, memories, made with family that will never be replaced.

Love is so powerful that even when we see it, feel it experience it, we cannot explain it

MISS NATHANIA



Love is at the epicentre of my growth and my authenticity.

MISS NATHANIA



Duo

MOTHERHOOD

MOTHERHOOD

MOTHERHOOD

Black motherhood is consistently moving forward and nurturing despite the social, political, economic challenges.

I was fortunate to grow up not only with both parents but also with a strong extended family of aunts, uncles, godparents, and close family friends who became pivotal figures in my upbringing. Alongside my mother, I had the guidance of my aunt, my nan, and several other influential women 'other-mothers' who, though not related by blood, have played significant roles in my life.

This diverse group of women offered me profound insights into femininity, womanhood, spirituality, motherhood, elegance, and fearlessness. Their varied experiences revealed the complexities of womanhood and motherhood, showing me that these roles are anything but simple. Yet, each woman embodied grace, spoke truthfully, and navigated the challenges of being Black, female, and working-class with resilience. It was only later in life that I became fully aware of this intersection, something I hadn't fully grasped in my younger years.



Female independence was the theme growing up, despite what in reflection was a challenging landscape, all of the women in my life were educated, working, some leaders in their industries, some homeowners, and fearless in making sure their voices were heard.

MOTHERHOOD

MOTHERHOOD

Black Love is affectionate, caring, passionate, strong, difficult, painful, cherished. Black love has sustained the test of time

The women in my life have always extended their love, homes, and wisdom to me. Every one of them instilled a different message, skill, insight, and experience that continued to shape who I have become and continue to become.

These women allowed me to be firm in my soul, and strong in my mind, they are blessings for each stage in my life.

MISS NATHANIA



“Love and honesty are the things that make a good wife and mother.”

JADA PINKETT-SMITH:

MOTHERHOOD

A Mothers love is absorbing any pain, struggle, challenge the world will send your way in the hope to preserve your joy for as long as possible

There's a profound, indescribable love you feel when you look at your child, this small person you've created.

It's an intensity that consumes me, a tightness in my chest made up of both fear and the fierce need to protect. It awakened something primal in me, pushing an urgency where success became non-negotiable and by any means necessary. Looking at this little girl, so innocent, happy, and beautiful, was a turning point in my life. Everything I once was would no longer exist.

From that moment on, everything I did would be for her. Each time I looked into her eyes, I promised myself I would create an incredible life for her, with no excuses, even as a single mother.



"Becoming a mother forced me to have hope."

NEFERTITI AUSTIN



MOTHERHOOD

Black Love is affectionate, caring, passionate, strong, difficult, painful, cherished. Black love has sustained the test of time

I made a solemn promise to God that there would be no excuses when it came to the life my daughter would live. For the most part, I stayed true to that promise, but I also had moments where I fell short. I was fortunate to have a loving extended family and a nurturing nursery that only enriched the love and joy my daughter experienced at home. However, junior school was a different story. Attending a private, all-white school as the only Black child, my daughter faced her first experiences of racism and isolation. In my determination to give her the best education, I fought those battles, while also grappling with financial struggles, until it became too much. By year five, we made the decision to move her to a new school.

That decision turned out to be one of the best. I saw her light return, she made diverse friends, enjoyed going to school again, and started to smile like her old self. She discovered a love for horses, a passion we never anticipated would turn into a potential career path. Her confidence began to flourish once more.



Her confidence was restored, but we had to sit down for an honest conversation as mother and daughter about racism and the social, political, and economic challenges she would inevitably face. This conversation became the foundation for how she would navigate secondary school. Secondary school proved to be another institution that drained my child's spirit. Once again, I found myself in constant battle with the school and its staff, fighting to protect her joy. Unfortunately, by then, much of that joy had already been overshadowed by anxiety.

“Plus One”

MOTHERHOOD

Motherhood is an unbreakable bond, that creates a safe space to be your complete authentic self so that you can thrive.

For me, the beauty of motherhood lies in knowing I have a lifelong companion to share experiences, adventures, dinners, travel, laughter, movie nights, inside jokes, fashion, and my truest self with. Together, we've traveled to Spain several times, explored Japan, New York, and Greece, Dubai, and she's also visited Jamaica with my parents and family, as well as Germany with her school. Not to mention our countless hotel and spa trips, city getaways, concerts, Basketball games and restaurant outings.

Some of my best moments in life have been with my daughter, weekends and holidays, binge-watching shows, listening to music, and laughing together. The quality time we've shared has healed my heart and restored the joy I thought I had lost.



Motherhood forces you to examine every aspect of yourself, your behaviour, the way you speak, your habits, and your mindset, and truly reflect on whether you're practicing what you preach. Your child becomes a reflection of who you truly are. As a result, I've had to focus on healing and doing the inner work to become the best version of myself, so that what I project and teach are the qualities that will empower my daughter to elevate, both internally and externally.



“Plus One”

MOTHERHOOD

Black Motherhood is praying for protection, guidance, wisdom, decrement, love, joy, good health etc over your child.

Motherhood has been a rollercoaster, but watching my daughter grow into a beautiful, loving, intelligent, and independent thinker is an blessing I am continually grateful for. We are a team, and who she becomes is what drives me to keep pushing on my own journey of healing and personal and financial success, so I can provide a solid foundation for her to become her greatest self.

Motherhood has taught me that seeing your child smile is a victory in itself. Creating joyful memories is what truly matters. Encouraging and supporting independent thinking so that they feel confident in who they are and in using their voice is fundamental.

Motherhood has given me a love that transformed me from who I was to who I am becoming. It has made me more patient, improved my ability to listen, and inspired me to explore life and learn new things alongside my "plus one."



I'm in a new chapter in my life, and I'm not even trying to be who I was. It's so beautiful that children do that to you."

BEYONCE



2021

FREEDOM

STYLE AND POWER

FREEDOM

STYLE & POWER

I will never apologise for always being put together, I do not know any other version of me, this is who I AM!

A core part of my identity is deeply rooted in how I choose to express myself through fashion. From a young age, my parents always dressed me well, ensuring my outfits were coordinated. As I grew older, they instilled in me the importance of being well-groomed, clean, and authentic in my appearance.

Like many, I went through my share of fashion missteps in my teens, experimenting with different silhouettes and colors until I found what truly worked for me. It was during this process that I began designing my own pieces.

The pink dress with the attached headpiece is one I designed for myself for a Christmas event in 2021. The hood, which can be detached, adds a regal element when worn. After commissioning this design, several plus-size women admired the look and asked my dressmaker to create versions for them in various colors. This experience once again sparked the idea of creating my own collection for curvy women, something I've seriously considered pursuing.



"24 hours and it's Dancehall theme, so I had to go to the vault"

This was the caption under this image, taken at an outside BBQ party that was a dancehall theme. Coming straight off the motorway, to face only half an outfit being delivered, I had to drive to another city, 45 min away, I ended up running into the house and pulling some pieces together. But as someone who has observed the fashions of dancehall since the 80s, the assignment was understood.

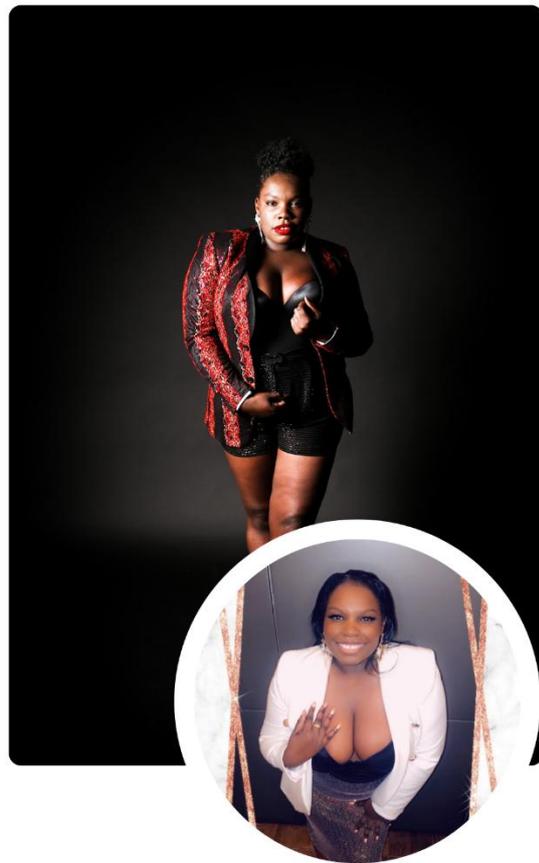
POWER

STYLE & POWER

We dress certain way, we walk a certain way, we talk a certain way, we create a certain way, all of these things we do in different, unique specific way that is a reflection of us.

After a long period of healing and facing myself in the mirror to forgive my past failures. I made the decision to start again and build a brand where I was my own muse. A brand that would celebrate people who are bold, unconventional, and too big for the spaces they've been confined to.

Thus, *Her House of Mastery* was born. The first image from my campaign featured me as plus-size, dark-skinned woman standing fully in my power. In this image, and the others that followed, I shed external expectations and showed up as the intelligent, creative, and assured Black woman I am, influenced by both Hip Hop and Dancehall culture.



The two additional images were chosen as extensions of my initial vision. The image featuring the beaded skirt and blazer was accompanied by the quote, "*Somewhere between lady and dancehall queen.*" That post resonated with women who could relate to the space within us that we've often felt pressured to hide in order to avoid judgment and over-policing. It spoke to the balance many of us navigate between expressing our authentic selves and conforming to societal expectations.



2021

UNIQUE

FOREVER I AM THAT GIRL

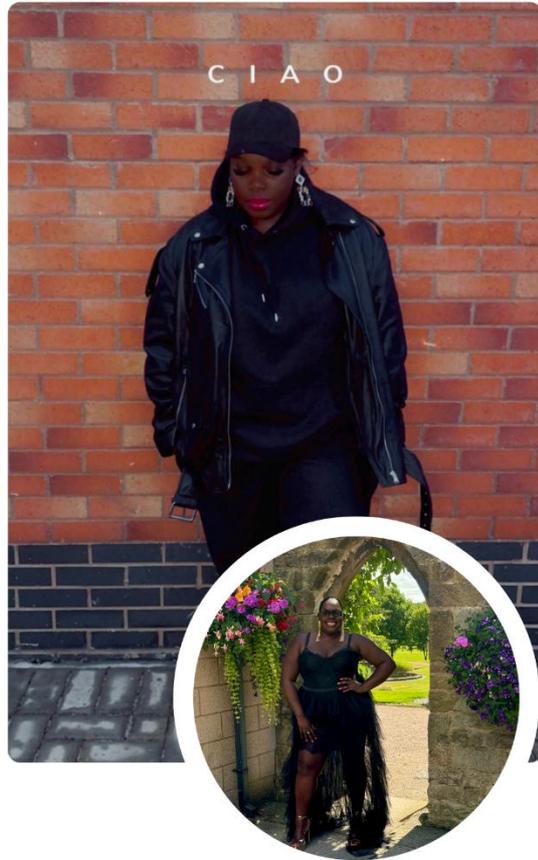
Armour

STLYE & POWER

The Blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice, I want all things Black, I own everything Black! – Kendrick Lamar

Black clothing is often associated with mourning, invisibility, or hiding, but for me, it has always been an extension of my power. It's a mysterious armour that exudes seriousness, prestige, strength, and sensuality, exactly how I feel when I wear it.

In all of these images, I was attending music events, concerts, VIP shows, and parties. As I reflected on the significance of this, I had a revelation. Having struggled with anxiety for nearly two decades, I often spend a lot of time mentally preparing to be in spaces filled with people. I realised that, despite my belief in what black represents, it has become my subconscious protective armour, shielding me from the overwhelming collective energies of the crowd.



Black magic, Black excellence,
Black habits, this Black
medicine, everything Black
tux, Black love everything

D SMOKE

EXPRESSION

STYLE & POWER

'I'm way to savage and don't meet industry standards. They say im not a queen when I act like this, and talk my shit - Bri steves

Growing up my dad's style was extremely influential to me, no matter where he was or what room he walked into his presence was felt.

Once he became a lawyer, he was always impeccably dressed in tailored suits, custom pieces, exclusive designer brands, silk ties, custom and designer shoes, luxury aftershaves, custom Jewellery, and custom 4x4.

They say your children become what you see, and I was an example of that. The suits and custom pieces became a staple element of my wardrobe, but more importantly, I also realised that tailoring made me feel powerful and sexy.

However just wearing a well-tailored suit was not enough, bold block colours are not often found in corporate spaces, and in some way, this also became a part of my voice.



"OH SHE THINKS SHE
IMPORTANT"
ME- A QUEEN, THAT'S
ON GOD, I CAN'T THINK
LESS OF MYSELF

Bri Steves



2021

EXPRESSION

FASHION IS HERITAGE

HERITAGE

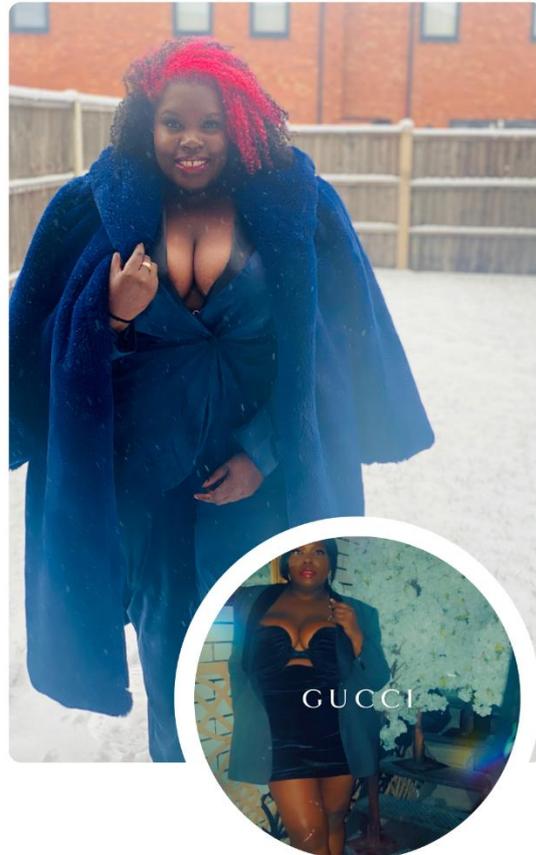
STYLE & POWER

Unique, I am one of one, I am number one, I am the only one, don't even waste your time trying to compete with me - Beyonce

Freedom, intuition, imagination, inspiration, and sensitivity are the meanings of the color blue. So, when my aunt gifted me a sequined dress that once belonged to Nanny Atkinson, I knew I wanted to make it my own, to wear it proudly and eventually pass it down to future generations. I had the dress customised to blend our family heritage with my personal style.

The night I wore it, I felt regal, special, and beautiful in a way I hadn't experienced before. Part of that feeling came from knowing that the dress was a fusion of legacy and contemporary femininity within my family, instilling in me a confidence that was undeniable.

The additional images showcase my continued love for tailoring, a craft I learned from my dad. I adore how tailored pieces fit my body, empowering me to feel confident and comfortable in every space I enter.



There are no rules about how you represent yourself. My work is more an attempt to show a spectrum of myself rather than a certain way of behaving or looking."

GRACE WALES BONER

EXPRESSION

FASHION AS POWER

Black Love is affectionate, caring, passionate, strong, difficult, painful, cherished. Black love has sustained the test of time

The pink feathered dress was a custom piece I designed for my first film awards, where I attended as both a line producer for a short film and a costume designer for a feature. It was an incredible night, celebrating wins with friends and family in an industry that, much like dance, makes me feel alive and allows me to show up as my authentic self.

The red dress was another custom creation, worn during the Christmas season to celebrate with family after a challenging year. In that moment, we felt regal, beautiful, elegant, and blessed to be together as cousins, sisters, and family.

The final image showcases a style piece I wore to a friend's wedding in Santorini. I included this image because it was another reminder of the impact my style has and how much it continues to inspire other women.



THEY WANTED US DOWN, BUT
LOOK AT US NOW, THEY
COUNTED US OUT, THEY DIDNT
THINK THEY WE WOULD MAKE IT,
NO, THEY DIDNT BELIEVE IN US,
BUT I KNOW
GOD DID

Dj Khaled

2021



POWER

BLACK GIRL FLY

PHASE 2

Rhythms of Resistance: Navigating Identity, Empowerment, & Creativity in Hip Hop as a Black Female Entrepreneurial Mother

Ethnomusicology



Rhythms of Resistance: Navigating Identity, Empowerment, and Creativity in Hip Hop as a Black Female Entrepreneurial Mother.

Themes: Musical Affinities, Identity Formation, Empowerment, Cultural and Spiritual Connectivity and Impact of Hip Hop Feminism

 Either link Spotify:

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1HBc2koiP5Hh5GOZdBGWoA?si=3_dhxg3eSOSOb9lpj_WyOg

Apple: <https://music.apple.com/gb/playlist/intricate-mastery/pl.u-JPAZBZZIDWeaVx9>

Introduction

Music is a vital instrument for fostering connectivity, identity formation, personal expression, and mindset a hypothesis intricately woven throughout this thesis. This thesis has positioned music, particularly within the realms of 80's/90's Soul, Reggae, Dancehall, Hip Hop and Rap, as vital tools for fostering connectivity, strengthening familial bonds, contributing to identity formation, a sense of belonging, and providing a powerful medium for personal expression and becoming.

“In my lived Experience music mirrored the pulse of collective consciousness, it became a reflection of shared experiences that allowed me to expand and learn, deepening my understanding of our interconnectedness”.

Atkinson (2024)

This chapter delves deeper into the transformative power of music specifically Hip Hop culture which in the wider thesis constitutes the musical genres of Rap, R&B, and its roots in reggae and Dancehall, but this chapter focuses on female rap. Examining their specific influence on Black girls, women, and mothers as they navigate their paths as creative

entrepreneurs. This is not an exhaustive scholarly study of human musicality, so much as an attempt to reconcile my experiences and the wider experiences of musical experience and influence in the journey towards becoming.

Central to this chapter is investigating the following research question: 'What influence does Hip Hop culture and Rap music have on Black girls, women, and mothers as female creative entrepreneurs? Furthermore, how have these individuals utilised Hip Hop culture and Rap music to re-imagine their experiences and navigate their entrepreneurial journeys?'

The work of North, Hargreaves, and Hargreaves (2004), who assert the contextual value of music, Valentine and Evans (2001) who highlight its positive effects on mood, Davidson (2011) who notes its role in promoting engagement, and Clift et al. (2010) who emphasise its impact on quality of life, amongst other contemporaries are considered in this chapter although I attempt to lean into the work of Black music scholars, including the ethnomusicologists Cheryl L. Keyes and Portia K. Maultsby, alongside Hip Hop feminist Morgan (1999) and Bowen (2022). I employ an interdisciplinary approach drawing from multiple fields of study including ethnomusicology and media studies, women and gender studies, African American studies, and sociology to explore the ethnomusicological dimensions experienced by Black female creative entrepreneurs. This exploration is enriched by my personal journey, offering a unique perspective that is central to the thesis, alongside a broader examination of the subject.

Subverting Misogynoir: Hip Hop Feminism, Trap Feminism, and the Ethnomusicological Praxis of Black Female Creative Entrepreneurial Mothers

Through the lens of TDBFE, this thesis integrates the intersection of Hip Hop feminism and Trap feminism, this thesis draws upon the foundational works of Joan Morgan and Sesali Bowen, two pivotal scholars whose contributions redefine how we view Black women and in the the context of this thesis BFCEM's relationship to Hip Hop culture. Morgan's Hip Hop Feminism (1999) and Bowen's Trap Feminism (2021) build on the intellectual tradition of earlier scholars like Pough (2004) and Lindsey (2013) while carving out unique spaces for Black women to engage with, resist, and transform Hip Hop and Dancehall music. These frameworks not only challenge traditional male-dominated narratives but also foreground the voices and experiences of Black women as central to the cultural, entrepreneurial, and political landscape of these genres.

Morgan (1999) asserts that Black women in Hip Hop occupy a dual space of pleasure and pain. Morgan continues to emphasise that Hip Hop is both empowering and problematic, offering Black women an avenue for self-expression while also being steeped in misogyny.

TDBFE illuminates the significance of Morgan's (1999) assertion that "Hip Hop feminism demands that we unapologetically embrace the contradictions inherent in being Black and female in a culture that at times loves us and at other times despises us" (p. 38). This is critical to understanding how BFCEMs perform and resist within Hip Hop spaces, crafting narratives of resilience while critiquing misogyny.

Sesali Bowen's Trap feminism expands upon Morgan's ideas by situating Black women's experiences within the context of Trap music, a subgenre often linked to the lived realities of poor and working-class Black communities. Bowen's work insists on the legitimacy of both the intellectual and lived experiences of Black women in shaping feminist praxis.

"Black women's lives are complex and it is crucial that we recognise that pleasure, survival, and ambition are not mutually exclusive but instead deeply intertwined"

Bowen (2021, p. 45))

Through the lens of TDBFE, this thesis demonstrates how BFCEMs leverage cultural spaces, particularly in Hip Hop, for economic empowerment, community building, and intergenerational mobility. TDBFE positions BFCEMs not as peripheral figures in a male-dominated field, but as powerful cultural producers, critics, and entrepreneurs who actively redefine narratives of Black womanhood, exemplified by artists such as Queen Latifah, Rapsody, Cardi B, Missy Elliott, and MC Lyte.

Integrating ethnomusicology and Black feminist epistemology, this thesis frames the cultural production of BFCEMs in Hip Hop as legitimate and transformative knowledge-making. Ethnomusicology provides a nuanced analysis of music's sonic, social, and spatial dimensions, revealing how sound both reflects and shapes lived realities. Black feminist epistemology foregrounds the embodied, situated knowledge of marginalised Black women, validating their SPEC challenges as foundational to critical inquiry. This interdisciplinary approach highlights how music functions as an expressive and commercial tool through which BFCEMs assert power, pursue upward mobility, and foster community, while simultaneously resisting oppression through creativity, critique, and innovation.

Yet, both Hip Hop and Trap have historically been marked by misogyny. Black women's resistance in these spaces often entails navigating entrenched patriarchal norms. As Morgan

(1999) contends, Hip Hop feminism demands an “unapologetic confrontation with the tensions between empowerment and exploitation” (p. 41). Bowen (2021) further critiques Trap feminism for sometimes glorifying individual success and capitalism without addressing systemic barriers.

Navigating these tensions is, as Kendrick Lamar observes, a continual negotiation between love and war, both of which are necessary for survival (Greenidge, 2024). In Chelyl L. Keyes' germinal work, *Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance*, she refers to an interview where MC Lyte was asked if she felt there was a distinct female rap category. MC Lyte separates female rappers into three groups, reigning in three periods, the early 1980s, the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, and the late 1990s: “Sha-Rock, Sequence, to me, that’s the first crew. Then you got a second crew, which is  Salt-N-Pepa, Roxanne Shanté, me, Latifah, Monie Love, and Yo-Yo. . . . Then after that, you got Da Brat, Foxy Brown, Lil’ Kim, Heather B” (1996).

In my overview of female rap, a timeline exists within my lived experience between 1986-2024, this is not to take away from the pioneers such as Sha Rock, Roxanne, etc. The early groupings are echoed, with 1986-1990 noted as Female Empowerment, entitled “Queen mothers” Keyes (1999),” bringing a mix of confidence, social activism, street style, intelligence, independence, and equal lyrical ability that could compete with male rappers. For example, Queen Latifah represented what Angela Y. Davis (1998) would describe as a representation of female empowerment and spirituality, making clear their self-identification as warrior, priestess, and queen. Additionally, she was also viewed as a motherly figure despite her youthfulness, embodying the idea of the Hip Hop mother or “Queen mother” (Keyes, 1999). This Notion embodies and musical form of “other mothering”, Collins (2000).

The period from 1994 to 1996 marked a pivotal shift in Hip Hop culture and Rap music, characterised by the emergence of both tomboy and hypersexualised female rappers. These women challenged traditional gender norms and introduced a new era of sexual agency and self-expression, sparking what can be viewed as a sexual revolution within the genre. Figures like Da Brat, with her tomboy persona, and Lil’ Kim, with her hypersexualised image, disrupted the previously established dynamics between men and women in Hip Hop, asserting their presence in a male-dominated space. These artists did not merely replicate existing power structures but instead redefined femininity, presenting themselves as sexually autonomous and financially independent. As Joan Morgan (1999) argues, these women “played with sexuality on their own terms, using it both as a weapon and a shield” (p. 58), positioning themselves at the intersection of empowerment and exploitation. Morgan’s Hip Hop feminism provides a critical framework for understanding this shift, asserting that these

women embodied the complexities of Black womanhood, confronting both sexism and racism within the industry.

Significantly, this period also saw an increase in commercial success for female rappers, which came with its own set of contradictions. As scholars like Tricia Rose (2008) have highlighted, while women gained visibility, they were also subject to commodification and hypervisibility that catered to male fantasies and corporate interests. Lil' Kim's sexually explicit lyrics and provocative imagery, for instance, were both liberating and controversial, as they challenged the patriarchal gaze but also risked reinforcing it. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's (1993) concept of "the politics of respectability" is relevant here, as these women navigated societal expectations around Black female respectability while pushing the boundaries of what was considered acceptable within both Hip Hop and broader cultural contexts.

Sesali Bowen (2021), revisits these themes, arguing that the sexual autonomy of female rappers like Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B continues to build on the legacy of earlier artists like Lil' Kim. Bowen (2021) emphasises that these women "reclaim sexuality as a site of pleasure and power, rejecting narratives of victimhood" (p. 77). This aligns with Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) work on controlling images and the ways Black women have historically been subjected to stereotypes like the Jezebel, while simultaneously resisting and redefining those images through their artistic expression.

The sexual revolution initiated by female rappers between 1994 and 1996 was not merely about gaining visibility in Hip Hop; it was a complex renegotiation of power, gender, and sexuality that continues to influence contemporary female artists.

 Da Brat, Foxy Brown, and Lil' Kim began the golden era, introducing a wider variation of femininity, girlhood, womanhood, freedom, style, and language. However, they also arguably initiated the era of capitalism and exploitation, becoming a prototype of the formula that could be packaged and sold to the masses. While this period was a backdrop to the lives of many Black girls and women, in our celebration of being free to be and be seen in all our womanliness, we overlooked the reframing and reimagining of historically harmful stereotypes, such as the jezebel, welfare queen, and angry Black woman, that have plagued the lives of Black women.

By 1998-1999,  Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott and Lauryn Hill emerged into the mainstream, catalysing significant shifts within Hip Hop culture. These artists redefined female identity and empowerment, creativity, spirituality, style, expression, and lyricism. Their influence was multifaceted: Elliott's groundbreaking work as a plus-size, darker-

skinned Black woman with an eccentric creative flair and originality shattered industry norms, demonstrating that such an identity could dominate the music industry beyond Hip Hop culture. This was a transformative moment, as it challenged entrenched stereotypes and broadened the representation of Black women in media. Elliott's innovative music videos and genre-defying sound, along with Hill's profound lyrical content and fusion of hip-hop with soul and reggae, carved out new spaces for Black women to be visible and respected.

As one participant expressed, '*Listening to Lauryn Hill taught me that I didn't need to choose between intellect and vulnerability.*'" (BFCEM, 39, London)

This era underscored the necessity of intersectionality in understanding the diverse experiences of Black women in the music industry (Baker, 2016; Pough, 2015). Their success not only altered the trajectory of hip-hop but also contributed to broader cultural conversations about body image, colourism, and female empowerment in the late 20th century and beyond.

2000-2010 saw a significant decrease in the number of female rappers emerging into the mainstream with some seeing momentary success before once again becoming invisible. This included artists such as  Charlie Baltimore, Rah Digga, Eve and Angie Martinez, to name a few.

This historical perspective underscores the importance of exploring Black cultural music, especially Hip Hop, within Black communities as it relates to the experiences of Black girls, women, and mothers. In this context, the exploration of Black cultural music, particularly Hip Hop, within Black communities is of paramount importance as it demonstrates an evolution of identity, mindset, and aspiration that has indirectly impacted, influenced and re-imagined the lives and entrepreneurial journeys of Black girls, women, and mothers (explored later in the chapter), that has affected the wider social, political, economic, and cultural landscape. By doing so, there is an opportunity to highlight the cultural, social, and artistic significance of musicality and Hip Hop culture/Rap music as a transformative force within this cohort.

1986(3)

Salt-N-Pepa's release of "Push It" in 1987 was a pivotal moment in the evolution of hip-hop and rap music, marking a significant milestone for female representation in a predominantly male-dominated industry. The group, comprised of Cheryl "Salt" James, Sandra "Pepa" Denton, and later DJ Spinderella, was among the first female rap groups to achieve mainstream success, breaking barriers and setting new standards for women in the genre.

Salt-N-Pepa were trailblazers in promoting female empowerment through their music and public personas. By addressing themes relevant to women and marginalised communities, they positioned themselves as role models and voices for those often underrepresented in the music industry. Their success challenged the stereotype that rap was exclusively a male domain, opening doors for future female artists.

Their influence extended beyond their music, impacting fashion, culture, and social norms. They brought a fresh, bold perspective to the genre, combining lyrical prowess with a keen sense of style and stage presence.

Salt-N-Pepa's style was a unique blend of strength and femininity. They were known for their bold fashion choices, which ranged from hard, colourful oversized leather jackets to sultry spandex bodysuits. This juxtaposition of toughness and sensuality allowed them to embody a multifaceted image, appealing to a diverse audience and challenging traditional notions of what female rappers should look like.

Salt-N-Pepa's boldness and unapologetic attitude were integral to their success. They were not afraid to address controversial topics or push the boundaries of what was considered acceptable for women in the music industry. Their willingness to speak their minds and stay true to their identities made them icons and pioneers in the world of hip-hop.



1988 (5)

MC Lyte's emergence in the hip-hop scene significantly contributed to the natural evolution of female empowerment within the genre. Her unique style and lyrical prowess offered a fresh perspective that further solidified the presence of women in hip-hop.

MC Lyte distinguished herself with her sharp wit, intellectual lyrics, and formidable battle rap skills. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she focused on storytelling and delivering messages with depth and substance. Her ability to craft clever rhymes and address complex topics set her apart and earned her respect in a genre often dominated by men.

As one of the pioneers of female rap, MC Lyte broke new ground with her debut album, *Lyte as a Rock*, released in 1988. This album was significant as it was the first full solo album by a female rapper.

She will become a vocal advocate for women's rights and representation in hip-hop. Using her platform to challenge the misogyny prevalent in the industry, calling out sexism and advocating for equality. Her activism will help to raise awareness about the challenges faced by female artists and push for greater inclusion and respect for women in hip-hop.

MC Lyte's style was a blend of androgyny and femininity, often seen wearing full suits, long trench coats, and oversized clothing that defied traditional gender norms. Her look was both practical and stylish, embodying a tomboy flair while still maintaining elements of femininity with accessories like statement earrings. This unique fashion sense allowed her to express her identity authentically and challenge conventional notions of gender presentation in hip-hop.

Despite her androgynous style, MC Lyte always embraced her womanhood. Her fashion choices and lyrical content conveyed strength and resilience, showing that femininity and toughness could coexist. She was unapologetically herself, blending the gritty realism of street culture with an empowered female perspective.



1990 (7)

Queen Latifah's emergence in the Hip-Hop and entertainment industry marked a pivotal moment in the ongoing journey toward female empowerment and respect. Her influence would extend beyond music, to make a significant impact on cultural norms and the representation of women in media.

Queen Latifah made a powerful statement with her 1989 hit "Ladies First" and by 1993 anthem "U.N.I.T.Y.," which explicitly addressed issues of disrespect and violence against women. In "U.N.I.T.Y.," she famously demanded respect from men and condemned the derogatory use of the word "bitch." This song became an empowering anthem for women, advocating for self-respect and mutual respect between genders. By confronting these issues head-on, Queen Latifah positioned herself as a fierce advocate for women's rights and equality.

Queen Latifah seamlessly blended masculine and feminine energies in her persona and style. She embraced both strength and vulnerability, challenging traditional gender norms and showcasing the multifaceted nature of womanhood. This balance allowed her to connect with a broad audience and represent a diverse range of women.

Queen Latifah's music was a rich tapestry of various genres, including reggae, soul, and dance, which she skilfully incorporated into her hip-hop foundation. Queen Latifah's persona exuded inspiration and confidence she consistently demonstrated that women could be both nurturing and strong, breaking down stereotypes and inspiring countless individuals.

Queen Latifah's fashion sense was a reflection of her unique identity and cultural pride. She often wore urban streetwear, which resonated with her hip-hop roots, as well as African-inspired prints that celebrated her heritage. Her tailored pieces added a touch of sophistication, blending androgynous and feminine looks. This distinctive style made her a fashion icon and reinforced her message of self-expression and cultural pride.



1993/4 (10/11)

Smooth: The Embodiment of Empowered Femininity

Smooth, though active since 1990, gained significant attention in 1993. Her contribution to female rap is notable for her sophisticated blend of femininity, elegance, and seduction with a straightforward, sometimes tomboyish rap style. Smooth's image as an empowered woman was a precursor to the modern feminist wave within hip-hop. Her fashion choices and lyrical content presented a duality—simultaneously embracing traditional feminine allure while asserting independence and strength. This duality challenged the often one-dimensional portrayal of female rappers, paving the way for more nuanced representations of women in hip-hop.

Boss: The Archetype of Female Gangster Rap

Boss emerged as a formidable figure in female gangster rap, embodying a masculine aesthetic and lyrical content that mirrored the struggles articulated by her male counterparts. Her 1993 video "Go Deeper," set in an abandoned prison and featuring scenes of her in a straitjacket and brandishing a gun, was a stark, fearless portrayal of the harsh realities faced by Black women. Boss's unapologetic stance on issues such as survival, sexual responsibility, ageing, and violence resonated deeply, offering a raw, unfiltered perspective on the lived experiences of many women. Her work was instrumental in redefining toughness and resilience in the context of female rap.

MC Lyte: Redefining Hood Romance

MC Lyte's 1993 release "Roughneck" redefined the dynamics of gender relations in hip-hop. Adorned in baggy, oversized clothes and Timberlands, Lyte's style and lyrics provided an anthem for hood romance that diverged from the romanticised love songs of R&B and the hyper-sexualised rap from male artists. Instead, "Roughneck" articulated a desire for a masculine, dominant, and protective partner capable of navigating and shielding women from the socio-economic adversities of Black America in the 90s. Lyte's work highlighted a critical shift in the narrative, positioning women not as mere objects of desire but as active participants seeking partnership and protection within a challenging environment.

Queen Latifah: Confronting Misogyny and Advocating for Respect

Queen Latifah's 1993 single "U.N.I.T.Y." stands as a seminal work confronting the disrespect and violence faced by women, particularly in hip-hop culture. Addressing street harassment, domestic violence, and misogynistic slurs, Latifah's powerful lyrics and confident delivery offered a bold challenge to societal norms. Her style, a mix of masculine and feminine elements, further reinforced her message of empowerment and respect. Latifah's advocacy through her music provided a vital platform for women to speak out against injustices, significantly contributing to the broader feminist discourse within and beyond hip-hop.



1996(13)

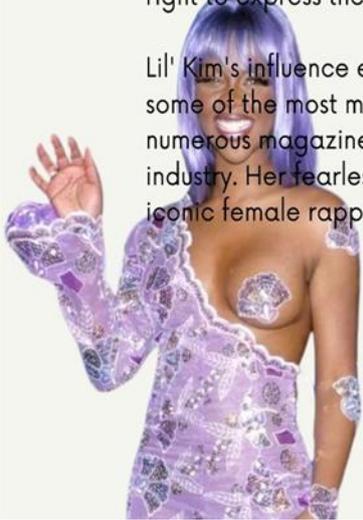
Lil' Kim, epitomizes the tenacity and resilience of a woman who rose from the harsh realities of Brooklyn, NYC, to become a trailblazer in the world of hip-hop. Her story is one of survival, female empowerment, and the relentless pursuit of dreams. Lil' Kim balanced a tough exterior with an undeniable femininity. Her fashion-forward sense was deeply influenced by her mother and the glamorous diva, Diana Ross alongside, Mary J Blige and Jane Jackson. These influences cultivated a style that was both bold and sophisticated, allowing Lil' Kim to stand out in the male-dominated world of hip-hop. Her look became synonymous with luxury and street style, merging the worlds of high fashion and urban grit. Lil' Kim shifted Hip Hop fashion becoming one of the Unsung heroes of Fashion.

Lil' Kim's early life was marked by significant hardship, including periods of homelessness and displacement. She and her mother lived out of a car's trunk until they could return to Brooklyn to stay with her brother and father. However, this stability was short-lived, and Lil' Kim found herself back on the streets. Despite these challenges, she hustled to survive, always driven by her dreams of finding love and success.

It was during this tumultuous period that she met Christopher Wallace, known as Biggie Smalls or The Notorious B.I.G. Biggie saw her potential and became her mentor, helping her navigate the path to becoming a rapper. Their relationship evolved into one of deep love and friendship, significantly shaping her career and personal life.

Lil' Kim's debut album, "Hard Core," was a groundbreaking work that shifted the scope of female empowerment and sexual liberation in hip-hop. Unapologetically bold, Lil' Kim's lyrics and persona challenged the taboos surrounding female sexuality, especially for Black women from the inner city. She became a voice for women who shared similar backgrounds and experiences, advocating for their right to express themselves freely and powerfully.

Lil' Kim's influence extended beyond music into the realm of fashion. She created some of the most memorable moments in female hip-hop fashion, appearing on numerous magazine covers and setting trends that continue to influence the industry. Her fearless attitude and unique style made her one of the most visually iconic female rappers of her time.



1996 (13)

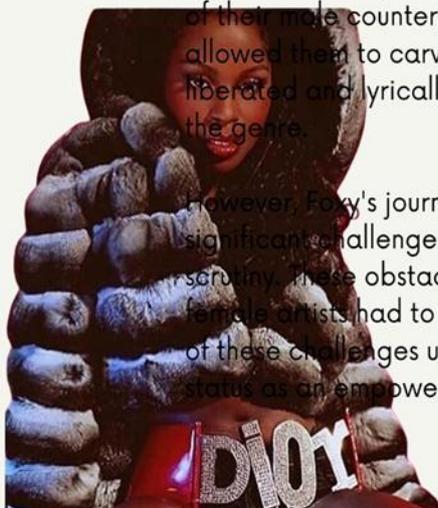
Foxy Brown's emergence in the mid-1990s marked a significant turning point in the landscape of female rap, coinciding with the rise of Lil' Kim. Both artists became emblematic of a sexual revolution within hip-hop, breaking barriers and redefining the role of women in the genre.

Foxy Brown burst onto the scene with a confident, no-nonsense persona that captivated audiences. Her dark-skinned beauty and assertive presence challenged the often colourist and misogynistic standards prevalent in the music industry. Foxy Brown's lyrics were a potent mix of hyper-sexualization and male fantasy, yet they also celebrated sexual liberation, confidence, and female dominance without shame. This duality in her music allowed her to navigate and challenge the contradictions within hip-hop culture, where women were frequently objectified but rarely empowered.

Foxy's collaboration with Jamaican dancehall elements brought the foundational roots of hip-hop back to the forefront, infusing her music with a vibrant, energetic sound that distinguished her from her contemporaries. This integration of dancehall not only broadened the musical palette of hip-hop but also highlighted the genre's deep connections to Caribbean culture, enriching its cultural tapestry.

Foxy Brown's fashion sense was a pivotal aspect of her persona, blending street style with luxury glamour, heritage brands and sex appeal. She elevated the glamorous "badass" female persona, drawing inspiration from Pam Grier's iconic character in the film "Foxy Brown." Her style was a fusion of bold, urban aesthetics and high-end fashion, embodying a sense of power and allure that resonated with her audience. Foxy Brown, alongside Lil' Kim, played a crucial role in breaking the "hypermasculinity" barrier in hip-hop. Their lyrics were as raw and unfiltered as those of their male counterparts, and their images were unapologetically sexy. This boldness allowed them to carve out a space for female rappers who could be both sexually liberated and lyrically aggressive, challenging the male-dominated narratives within the genre.

However, Foxy's journey was far from a fairy tale. Despite her success, she faced significant challenges, including industry misogyny, personal struggles, and public scrutiny. These obstacles highlighted the double standards and additional hurdles that female artists had to overcome in a patriarchal industry. Foxy's resilience in the face of these challenges underscored her strength and determination, further solidifying her status as an empowered heroine in hip-hop.



Musicality.

Musicality is weaved throughout this thesis, in the form of connectivity, identity and in practice as a sensory experience in the form of the playlist.

Phase 1 – Frames of Power (Photo Ethnography)

In Phase 1, music lyrics are deliberately curated within the photo-ethnographic framework to function not merely as a backdrop but as an affective, interpretive tool, heightening the emotional and visual resonance of each image. This methodological choice is deeply aligned with the DEP, which foregrounds the interplay between embodied experience, aesthetic expression, and socio-political context. In keeping with DEP's reflexive and multimodal approach, lyrical excerpts are selected based on the emotional states elicited during photo-elicitation and reflective analysis, enabling music to serve as a visceral conduit between inner feeling and visual representation. Rather than operating as passive ornamentation, these sonic elements act as narrative amplifiers, drawing on Eidsheim's (2019) theorisation of sound as a racialised and affective force, and Turino's (2008) conception of music as a site of social participation. Music in this phase thus transforms the photo essay into a participatory and relational space, deepening viewer engagement through a sensory fusion of sight and sound.

This approach also aligns with Born's (2013) notion of music as a medium that reconfigures public and private space; here, lyrics are used to sonically charge the visual environment, evoking the spatial and emotional terrain navigated by Black girls and women. Connell and Gibson's (2004) exploration of music as an emotional landscape further underscores how the selections reflect both individual and collective identity formation. Bohlman's (2020) global lens situates these emotional registers within broader diasporic flows, framing Black musical expression as simultaneously local and transnational. Through this integration, photo-ethnography within DEP becomes a performative, multimodal method of witnessing and worldmaking, a way to embody, archive, and reframe the affective geographies of Black female creative entrepreneurial life.

This sonic-visual methodology also anticipates the autoethnographic turn in later phases, where music becomes both memory archive and agent of transformation, further deepening DEP's emphasis on layered, lived, and expressive knowledge systems.

Phase 3 – Embodied Mastery (Autoethnography)

In the autoethnographic phase titled “*Embodied Mastery*,” music emerges not only as a conduit for emotional and physical expression but also as a core methodology for tracing memory, identity, and transformation. Rhythms and melodies embedded throughout this phase reflect key emotional states, joy, grief, resilience, ambition, and act as sonic vessels through which personal and communal experiences are articulated, embodied, and archived. This sonic-visual methodology also anticipates the autoethnographic turn in later phases, where music becomes both a memory archive and an agent of transformation, further deepening DEP’s emphasis on layered, lived, and expressive knowledge systems.

In “*Mother-Hood*,” musicality serves as a connective thread that binds sisterhood, other-mothering, and community-making. Here, music not only fosters relational intimacy but also provides an entry point into creative and professional spheres, underscoring its role as a vehicle for cultural transmission and intergenerational resilience. In “*X3I*,” music is positioned as foundational to entrepreneurial imagination, marking the genesis of my creative vision for economic mobility, self-determination, and community uplift. It is not merely an expressive outlet, but a strategic resource for achieving positionality and empowerment. Jackson and Sonnett (2022) affirm this intersection, highlighting how cultural industries like music enable marginalised individuals, especially Black women, to convert creativity into entrepreneurial power (see also Cooper, 2020).

In “*I Am My Father’s Daughter*,” the sonic archive predates Hip Hop, revealing how culturally conscious music within my familial and cultural landscape shaped emotional intelligence, identity formation, and entrepreneurial foresight. This resonates with Rose (1994) and Boyd (2004), who position music as both a cultural anchor and catalyst for envisioning new futures. The absence of music in “*Becoming Miss Nathania: Loss of Connectivity*” symbolises grief, dislocation, and emotional rupture. This sonic void reflects an inner shift toward roots reggae and instrumental sounds, aligned with Bradley’s (2017) exploration of music’s role in healing and reorientation.

In “*Muva Hustler*,” the analysis intensifies around capitalism and hyper-commercialisation, where music becomes a double-edged sword, fueling self-worth and aesthetic expression while also commodifying Black female identity. This tension echoes critiques by McLeod (2001) and hooks (1994) on the extractive tendencies of mainstream culture. “*My Own Muse*” marks a further evolution, where disillusionment with Hip Hop’s trajectory gives way to a re-centring through Dancehall and gospel. Despite Dancehall’s contradictions, its contemporary artists, Masicka, Kabaka Pyramid, Popcann, Shaniel Muir, and Jada Kingdom, offer a grounded mix of spirituality, survival, and aspiration. Gospel artists like Lecrae and

Mali Music extend this, blending faith and artistry in ways that affirm identity, healing, and purpose. These shifts align with Stanley-Niaah (2010) and Cooper (2004), who explore the spiritual, social, and entrepreneurial dimensions of diasporic music cultures.

The Playlist

Making a playlist is a delicate art. It's like writing a love letter, better in a way. You get to say what you want to say without actually saying it. You get to use someone else's poetry to express how you feel."

- Rob Brooks (played by Zoe Kravitz, 'High Fidelity', Hulu- 2020)

The music playlist incorporated in this thesis as both intext references and supportive audio serves as a vital sensory component, enabling readers to engage with the songs and lyrics referenced, thus immersing themselves in the emotional, cognitive, and cultural landscapes of the period, place, style and cultural landscape under study.

Playlists have functioned as complementary sources that not only reflect but also contextualise the autoethnographic and biographical narratives, illustrating how music intersects with and influences social, economic, political, and ecological issues (Rice, 2014).

Contemporary studies underscore the pivotal role of playlists in ethnomusicology, demonstrating how they create dynamic and immersive experiences that deepen our understanding of cultural and social phenomena (Steingo & Sykes, 2019). Playlists function as curated collections of music that can evoke specific historical, social, and emotional contexts, thus serving as powerful tools for ethnographic research and narrative construction (DeNora, 2021). By integrating the playlist, the research offers an opportunity to enhance sensory engagement, offering a multi-layered exploration of the subjects under study (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2020).

In this thesis, the playlist serves both complementary and independent functions, offering numerous opportunities for immersive and sensory experiences. When engaged in conjunction with the text, the playlist allows readers to audibly perceive the backdrop of each chapter, capturing the cultural context, emotional tone, and psychological mindset of the narrative as it unfolds. This auditory dimension enhances the in-text quotations of (song lyrics) by imbuing them with the tone and energy of the music, fostering a deeper connection and understanding (Peres Da Silva, 2019). By providing a musical landscape that mirrors the

written narrative, the playlist enriches the ethnographic account, making the cultural and emotional experiences more vivid and tangible (Sterne, 2020).

Additionally, the playlist can be experienced independently of the text, offering a standalone auditory journey that has the potential to evoke personal memories, emotions, and experiences. This independent engagement allows listeners to reflect on their own connections to the music, facilitating a personalised exploration of the themes presented in the study. Such an approach aligns with the concept of 'musical self-biography,' where individuals use music to narrate their life stories and personal transformations (Frith, 2020). By listening to the playlist on its own, one can gain further insight into the processes of evolution and transformation that are central to the narratives of Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers within the context of Hip Hop culture.

Although the playlist is not exhaustive, it encapsulates the essence of the autoethnographic journey, offering insights into my lived experiences of myself as a BFCM within the context of Hip Hop culture. This auditory accompaniment fosters a deeper understanding of narratives, enriching the methodological approach by providing a multi-sensory perspective on their social and cultural realities (Bramley, 2019).

Music is integral to human evolution, shaping our experiences from the prenatal stage through to the entirety of our lives. We are constantly surrounded by sounds, music, singing, and humming, that influence our moods, heart rates, and states of mind. As a core human experience, music reflects our cognitive capabilities and is intertwined with basic human needs, stemming from millennia of neurobiological development. Schulkin and Raglan (2014) argue that music facilitates unique expressions of social bonds and enhances relational connectedness. Recent studies support this, highlighting music's role in social cohesion and emotional regulation (Savage et al., 2021). Music significantly shapes our identities and narratives, influencing who we become and how we perceive the world. This study explores the evolution of music and lyrical content and how these elements resonate with individuals at different life stages. As DeNora (2000) articulates, music acts as a resource for the construction of self-identity and social interaction, providing a framework through which individuals navigate their social worlds.

My connection with music, akin to dance, transcends its melodic and harmonic structures, encompassing its boundless expressive capacity and self-generated nature (Koelsch, 2010). This connection evokes a sense of freedom, allowing for existence beyond societal constraints, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Music and dance create a space for vulnerability and transparency, serving as mediums for expressing suppressed thoughts and feelings. This liberation is essential for understanding the transformative potential of music

within ethnomusicological studies (Turino, 2008). Music offers numerous therapeutic benefits, including stress relief, pain management, and mood enhancement (Northshore.org, 2020). A study by Raglio et al. (2015) found that music-based activities significantly improved emotional expression, communication, and self-esteem. Contemporary research continues to affirm these findings, demonstrating that music therapy can enhance cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and social connectivity (Gold, Voracek, & Wigram, 2004; Altenmüller & Schlaug, 2015).

This phase of the research study seeks to provide a musical representation that captures the interconnectedness of social, political, economic, cultural, and geospatial contexts at various points in the autobiography/biography. By presenting a musical narrative, this study positions each stage of the Black female creative entrepreneurial mother's journey within transatlantic spaces, framed by the backdrop of Hip Hop. This approach not only enriches the autoethnographic method but also underscores the profound impact of music on identity formation and socio-cultural navigation (Saldanha, 2020)."

Ref to Appendix 1 playlist table.

Gendered Music Preferences and the Empowering Role of Music for Black Women in Hip Hop

Several studies have demonstrated differences between male and female listener's music preferences (Colley, 2008; North & Hargreaves, 2007; O'Neill, 1997), suggesting that systematic gender differences in music preferences are shaped by gender-role socialisation into male toughness and female emotionality. Such differences in musical behaviour are often attributed to gendered affect proneness and personality traits, which may be driven by physiological differences in emotional experience (Bradley, Codispoti, Sabatinelli, & Lang, 2001). Female listeners, for instance, are often noted to use music more frequently to fulfil emotional needs (North et al., 2000). However, I argue that this generalisation does not fully capture the experiences of female participants in Hip Hop culture, particularly BFCEMs. For these women, music is not merely a tool for emotional fulfilment; it is a powerful medium for voice, visibility, mobility and empowerment. This perspective aligns with Transatlantic TDBFE, which emphasises the importance of Black women's lived experiences and the ways in which they navigate and resist oppressive structures through cultural expression (Collins, 2000). This analysis contributes to addressing the research question by illuminating how Black women within Hip Hop use music as a form of cultural and entrepreneurial agency, challenging prevailing gendered assumptions about music consumption and emotionality.

Music as a Voice for Black Women

In the context of Hip Hop, music serves as a platform for Black women to articulate their experiences, assert their identities, and challenge societal norms. Hip Hop culture has historically provided a space where marginalised voices can be heard, and for Black women, and in this thesis BFCEMs it has become a critical avenue for self-expression and empowerment. This is reflected in the contributions of Chika,  A bold lyricist and advocate for mental health, marginalised Black women, empowering listeners through authenticity and resilience. Jamilah Lemieux, Writer and cultural critic known for her work with *Cassius* and *The Root*, Lemieux she tackles gender, race, and societal norms within Hip Hop, amplifying voices of Black women and reshaping narratives in the media. Issa Rae, Creator and producer who showcases multidimensional Black women in shows like *Rap Sh!t*,  And friend and songwriter for *Rap sh!t* and the likes of Nikki Minaj and Kash Doll , rapper, and creative director “A. Chic” Kirsten Spencer. 

As Morgan (2015) suggests, Hip Hop has allowed Black women to navigate their intersecting identities, using their voices to confront issues such as racism, sexism, and classism continuing bell hooks concept of “Talking Back”. This aligns with the broader goals of Black feminist thought, which seeks to centre the experiences of Black women and highlight their resistance to systemic oppression.

Set against the backdrop of Hip Hop music and culture, my personal journey reflects the profound influence of these elements on my style, identity, and self-expression as a young Black female transitioning from Black girlhood to Black womanhood. The unapologetic, bold bravado of Black female voices, embodied by artists such as Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim, Lady of Rage, and Queen Latifah, became central to my identity formation. These artists entered mainstream pop culture and the Hip Hop landscape at a time when Black women were beginning to express the deepest, and at times, the darkest parts of their lives, as well as the aspirational, glamorous, and sexual aspects, unapologetically and explicitly. Their contributions challenged traditional narratives around Black femininity and offered alternative representations of Black womanhood that defy societal expectations (LaVouille & Ellison, 2018). This dynamic is a critical aspect of transatlantic Black feminist epistemology, which values the diverse expressions of Black womanhood and the ways in which these expressions resist dominant cultural narratives.

Complications of Subverting Tropes

Foxy Brown emerged as a significant figure, somewhat groundbreaking in Hip Hop. Entering the industry and cosigned by influential male artists like Jay Z and Nas. Despite navigating a male-dominated environment, Foxy asserted her power, independence, and cultural influence, becoming one of the first female rappers to bridge the worlds of luxury fashion and Hip Hop showing an elevated and aspirational Black Female from the environments I was familiar. Her 2001 interview on BET, during the launch of her album *Broken Silence* , candidly exposed the challenges she faced as a young Black woman in a patriarchal industry, especially in fighting for her voice to be heard and respected.

At the time, this interview resonated deeply with me, particularly in how Foxy Brown crafted her persona and aesthetic, which I consumed both as a listener and admirer. However, reflecting on this interview now, my relationship with it has transformed. Then, I admired her resilience and artistic expression from the perspective of someone deeply embedded in Hip Hop culture. Today, as a scholar and entrepreneur, I see her journey as a profound reflection of the complex interplay between gender, colourism, hypersexualization, stereotypes, misogynoir, exploitation and capitalism which holds several tensions that shape creative industries. Many intersecting in ways that are now the centre of uncomfortable conversations and realities, about who Black women are, who we should be and how we are treated in spaces we love and contribute. Yet Foxy Brown's ability to command space, redefine cultural narratives, and push against structural barriers mirrors my own evolution in navigating spaces that were not designed for women like us.

Through her lyrics, Foxy Brown told life stories, exuded ownership of her power, and claimed her space as an independent and assured woman. Her self-assured message was one I gravitated toward deeply, to the point that "Foxy Brown" became a nickname for me. I identified with her dark chocolate skin tone, and her love for glamorous fashion, shades, and heels, and I embodied the Foxy Brown bold, self-assured attitude in my own life, a transformation that is explored in the "*Style and Power*" elements of the photo ethnography and "*My Own Muse*" chapters of this thesis.

However, while artists like Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim acted as the foundation and have since been followed by Cardi B, Nikki Minaj, Megan the Stallion, City Girls and others have subverted traditional gender roles to re-imagine and reclaim hypersexualised images as tools of empowerment, this strategy also complicates the narrative of exploitation. By embracing and reappropriating these tropes, Black female artists navigate a delicate balance between empowerment and the risk of reinforcing the very stereotypes they seek to challenge which was previously noted in "*Muva Hustler*". Scholars such as Durham, Cooper, and Morris

(2013) argue that this reappropriation can serve as both a form of resistance and a means of survival in an industry that often commodifies Black women's bodies and identities. Yet, it also raises critical questions about the limits of empowerment within a capitalist framework that continues to exploit these representations for profit.

Impact on Future Female Representations in Hip Hop

Looking forward, these transformations in how BFCEMs in Hip Hop use music as a tool for empowerment and visibility will likely continue to influence female representations in the genre. As Hip Hop evolves, there is potential for a more nuanced understanding of Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood that transcends the binary of empowerment versus exploitation. The future of female representation in Hip Hop could move toward a space where diverse expressions of Black femininity are celebrated without being confined to the tropes of hyper-sexualisation or respectability politics. This shift would reflect a broader trend in Black feminist thought, which advocates for the recognition of Black women's agency in shaping their narratives and resisting the limitations imposed by both mainstream culture and the music industry.

*They say I'm stoosh cause I cover my bush
In that Dolce Gabbana, I'm a hot little mama,
The number one stunna
Slim, skin copper
Like bare bra, I'd eat that gravy proper,
Got a money fetish,
want to see me where your bed is?
Playboy y'all got to give me five letters,
Like Prada, Jacob, Fendi boots
C. Dior, Chloe, suits
Range Rover, Gucci shoes
First class, flight to, Paris*

Foxy Brown – Fallin 2001 



Image: 86 Foxy Brown

Navigating Identity and Power: Black Feminist Epistemology in Hip Hop Culture.

During my uncertain and often uncomfortable transition between girlhood and womanhood, Hip Hop mirrored and shaped my evolving identity. As one of the few women navigating predominantly male spaces daily, the importance of having a voice and being visible remained significant in my self-definition and self-valuation, which for Black women, I and other BFCEMs become an act of resisting societal marginalisation and oppression (Collins, 2000). I understood that to maintain power in these male-dominated environments, I would need to be assertive, intelligent, and unwavering while also embodying the aesthetics of a beautiful, elegant, soft feminine and mysterious woman. This duality of being a “perfect” balance of soft and strong, to not offend, reflects the intersectionality of race, gender, age and beauty standards that Black women must constantly negotiate, often within frameworks not designed with them in mind (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015). To be perceived as feminine, friendly, sexy, intelligent, non-threatening, approachable, skilled, exceptional but humble simultaneously. As a BFCEM I knew standing in my power and claiming visibility would be a challenge as a Black woman, invoking the concept of "controlling images" (Collins, 2000).

"I am healthy, I am wealthy

I am rich, I am that bitch (Yeah)

I am gonna go get that bag

And I am not gonna take your shit (Uh)

I am protected, well respected

I'm a queen, I'm a dream (Yeah)

I do what I wanna do

And I'm who I wanna be

Baby Tate, - *I Am* (2020) 

Contrary to the dominant discourse and concerns surrounding hypersexuality and objectification, rooted in the historical exploitation of Black female bodies, such as Saartjie “Sara” Baartman, who has often been cited as the origin of the restrictive sexual scripts imposed on Black women (Crais & Scully, 2008; Gilman, 1985; Magubane, 2001; Qureshi, 2004; Stephens & Phillips, 2003), the very body type that was once marginalised and objectified has become the desired aesthetic for girls and women today promoted by Hip Hop and Pop culture across social media platforms. This shift illustrates the dynamic nature of Black feminist epistemology, where the very traits that were once pathologised are re-imagined as sources of power and resistance (Morgan, 2000).

The rise of “designer bodies,” particularly surgical enhancements, has emerged as a dominant beauty standard within Hip Hop and Dancehall culture as well as pop culture. These bodies are not merely about aesthetics but are deeply connected to questions of agency and bodily autonomy, especially in a society that has historically commodified and exploited Black women's bodies (LaVouille & Ellison, 2018; Hobson, 2005). For BFCEM in the UK, USA, and Jamaica, these beauty ideals present both an opportunity and a burden. While some women see these enhancements as a way to reclaim power over their physical image, aligning with ideas of autonomy and empowerment, others face immense financial and health-related challenges in attempting to conform to these shifting ideals.

Artists such as Nicki Minaj and Cardi B, alongside video vixens and pop culture figures like Kim Kardashian, have been instrumental in reshaping beauty standards. They have crafted a new archetype that merges traditional markers of Black femininity, curvaceous bodies, fuller lips, and bold fashion, with exaggerated, hyper-sexualised imagery that traces back to historical influence. This archetype is now ubiquitous in Hip Hop and Dancehall subcultures, setting the tone for what is considered attractive and successful. The concept of the

“designer body” has become not only a symbol of beauty but also of status and success, particularly for women in these cultural and creative spaces. As Halliday (2021) notes, “the surgical body is the new luxury good, a visible marker of success and desirability within these cultural landscapes” (p. 158).

The impact of this shift goes beyond personal aesthetics; it has spawned an entire industry of “designer body” businesses and aesthetic entrepreneurs, from cosmetic surgeons to body contouring specialists, primarily targeting Black women, an area which requires more research. However, this pursuit of beauty is not without significant cost. For BFCEM, already navigating economic precarity, the financial burden of maintaining these beauty standards can be devastating. Halliday (2021) argues that the growing normalisation of cosmetic surgery, especially procedures like the Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL), puts many women at risk of health complications, including high mortality rates, as some seek unregulated, cheaper alternatives to keep up with these expectations (p. 162).

In Jamaica, the Dancehall scene has similarly adopted the “designer body” aesthetic, where surgically enhanced features are viewed as symbols of status and upward mobility. With statements such as *“Go get yuh dutty money and do yuh body”*, promoting a by any means necessary attitude towards obtaining the finances to pay for a body. Hope (2013) highlights how Dancehall culture's focus on “flossing” and physical appearance reflects broader socio-economic aspirations, particularly for women, where the body itself becomes a site of investment and capital. I posit that it also becomes problematic when thinking about ownership of the body and exploitation. Yet, this pursuit also reinforces rigid standards of beauty that often demand expensive surgeries and maintenance, contributing to cycles of financial instability for many women who participate in these cultural spaces.

The health risks tied to these beauty practices are significant. Beyond the immediate dangers of surgery, the psychological toll of adhering to constantly evolving standards of beauty is profound. The pressure to invest in one’s body to remain visible, relevant, and empowered within these subcultures creates an unsustainable cycle of financial and emotional strain for BFCEMs. This tension between cultural participation and self-preservation is further complicated by the fact that these beauty standards are often set by individuals with access to immense financial resources, such as celebrities like Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, and Kim Kardashian, whose influence shapes expectations for women across socio-economic backgrounds.

Thus, the rise of “designer bodies” within Hip Hop and Dancehall has caused a paradigm shift not only in beauty standards but also in the financial and health risks associated with the pursuit of these ideals. For BFCEMs, the cultural significance of these bodies intersects

with the pressures of entrepreneurship, positionality, and economic empowerment. While these bodies symbolise agency and the reclaiming of autonomy, they also reinforce the commodification of Black women's bodies, requiring critical reflection on how beauty, power, and status are constructed and contested within these subcultures.

This evolution is a testament to the complex interplay of identity, representation, and power in Hip hop feminism, where the body becomes a canvas for both self-expression and socio-political commentary (Pough, 2004; Durham, Cooper, & Morris, 2013). But also, a complex interplay of female value, power, femineity and acceptance. As a BFCEM navigating this shift, additional pressure arises in whether to alter surgically alter the body in the name of upward mobility and financial gain and positionality, which is explored in the autoethnographic segment “*Muva Hustler*” chapter.

However, while this new archetype challenges historical narratives, it also raises critical questions about the extent to which these representations reinforce or resist dominant ideologies. The hypervisibility of surgically enhanced bodies in Hip Hop could be interpreted as both a reclaiming of Black female sexuality and a capitulation to Eurocentric beauty standards, a duality that Hip Hop feminism must continually navigate (Rose, 1994; Bailey, 2013). Furthermore, the celebration of such bodies may obscure the socio-economic inequalities that make these surgeries inaccessible to many, thereby perpetuating class-based distinctions within the Black community (Spillers, 1987; Taylor, 1998).



Image 87-88 Nikki Minaj and Lil Kim

Music, Attitude, and Mindset: The Journey of a BFCEMs

Ambition is priceless, it's something that's in your veins

And I put that on my name

Now I move with aggression, use my mind as a weapon

Cause chances are never given, they're taken like interceptions

So throw that pass, I'll be the cornerback

They gon' love me for my ambition

Easy to dream a dream, though it's harder to live it

My ambition to win, just to get me some ends

Help me pay my little rent, maybe sit in a Benz

I saw momma praying as she wait on results"

—Wale, Meek Mill, Rick Ross, "Ambition" 

The concept of Black Excellence has become a defining pillar in the identity formation and ambition of many Black women, particularly BFCEMs. One interview participant expressed this sentiment succinctly:

"Black Excellence is something I have aligned myself with, coming from African American and Hip Hop culture. This concept pushes me to always pursue excellence and greatness beyond what is expected of us socially as Black women and BFCEMs. I want to break all stereotypes of what a BFCEMs is or is not expected to be. I want to be great and Black Excellence gives me that energy." (BFCEM, 45, London)

This pursuit of greatness exceeds societal expectations and is critical to the lived experience of BFCEMs, as it provides a framework for empowerment, resilience, and the defiance of oppressive stereotypes.

Leaning into Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000), this pursuit of excellence is both a personal and collective act of resistance. Black women, historically marginalised and silenced, have developed unique epistemologies centred on resilience, self-reliance, and community upliftment. These principles of self-determination are reflected in the life stories of BFCEMs, who navigate multiple intersecting oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989). The quote above resonates deeply with Collin's idea that BFCEMs possess a unique standpoint based on their experiences of navigating a hostile social world, one that demands both intellectual and emotional labour to survive and thrive.

Hip Hop culture, which has long served as a vehicle for Black expression and empowerment, also plays a significant role in shaping the ambitions and identities of BFCEM. The influence of Tupac Amaru Shakur, who remains a personal favourite and one of the most iconic

figures within Hip Hop, underscores this connection. Shakur's legacy as a thinker and "warrior-poet" is one of unrelenting defiance against systemic injustice (Rose, 1994; Dyson, 2001). His storytelling, particularly in songs like *"Brenda's Got a Baby,"* illustrates the harsh realities faced by many Black communities, especially women. The song's narrative of abandonment, abuse, and systemic neglect became a formative influence for me during girlhood, as I felt deep compassion and empathy for girls and women with these life experiences, the exact thing I was grateful I had been protected from but also determined to avoid. Shakur's message, *"Just because you're in the ghetto doesn't mean you can't grow,"* echoes in my own life as a BFCEMs, reminding me that growth, even within oppressive environments, is not just possible, it is essential.

"I hear Brenda's got a baby

But Brenda's barely got a brain

A damn shame, the girl can hardly spell her name

(That's not our problem, that's up to Brenda's family)

Well, let me show ya how it affects the whole community

Brenda doesn't even know.

Just cause you're in the ghetto doesn't mean you can't grow (you can't grow)

But oh, that's a thought, my own revelation

Do whatever it takes to resist the temptation."

—Tupac Shakur, "Brenda's Got a Baby" 

This thesis narrative of growth and ambition for BFCEMs within oppressive systems reflects a core theme in Black feminist discourse. Scholars like Angela Davis (1989) and Brittney Cooper (2017) have highlighted how Black women have used creativity, intellectual labour, and collective action to overcome structural barriers, particularly those at the intersection of motherhood, and entrepreneurship. By 2011, as I transitioned into my own creative entrepreneurial journey attempting to balance motherhood with the pursuit of a sustainable future. I was inspired by songs like *"Ambition"* by Wale, Meek Mill, and Rick Ross, which served as a personal anthem. The lyrics, *"Ambition is priceless, it's something that's in your veins,"* reinforced my drive to persevere and action my dreams, despite the limitations and

societal expectations placed on me as a Black woman and mother. This song kept my spirit alive and focused on the bigger picture.

This mindset continues to reflect the core tenets of the TDBFE, which underscores the significance of self-reliance, ambition, and community upliftment for Black women navigating the intersections of race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1989; Cooper, 2017). As a Black female creative entrepreneur and mother, my journey embodied the challenges and triumphs of balancing personal ambitions with the responsibilities of nurturing a family, an experience that resonates with the broader narrative of Black women's struggle for economic empowerment and self-determination explored in previous chapters including "*Mother-Hood*" and "*X3!*".

In critically analysing the role of ambition in the lives of BFCEMs, it becomes evident that this trait is not just about personal success but also about challenging and transforming the oppressive systems that constrain Black women. The pursuit of Black Excellence is, therefore, both an individual and collective project, one that aligns with broader efforts toward social and economic justice. By rejecting the limiting stereotypes of Black motherhood, BFCEMs embodies the very principles of resilience and excellence that Black feminist thought has long championed.

Evolving Through the Beat: A Black Woman's Journey in Hip Hop from Girlhood to Motherhood

My journey from girlhood to womanhood and eventually to motherhood has been deeply entwined with the evolution of my identity and my complex relationship with Hip Hop culture. Reflecting on the critical moments of transformation that brought joy and confidence into my life, I find myself grappling with the dark realities that have recently surfaced, particularly the revelations surrounding the "*Diddy do it?*", which have tarnished many of the sounds and artists that resonated with me during my formative years. These revelations bring into sharp focus the deep and conflicting emotions that have shaped my path as a BFCEM, navigating both the Hip Hop music industry and the broader entertainment world in my roles as an artist and performance manager, particularly within the contexts of "*X3!*" and "*Muva Hustler*." This journey has been marked by an ongoing negotiation of my place within a culture that both nurtures and exploits, celebrates and marginalises Black women.

In the "*X3!*" chapter, I explore struggling with the disappointment of not breaking into the music industry at a pivotal time in my life, I now perceive that experience through a different lens. At the time, it felt like a personal failure, a missed opportunity to enter an industry that I

believed held the key to my creative and entrepreneurial aspirations. However, with the benefit of hindsight and the wisdom that comes with age and motherhood, I recognise that my exclusion from the industry may have been a blessing in disguise. The entertainment industry including the Hip Hop sphere, is rife with misogyny, and abuse, forces that I may not have been fully equipped to confront at that earlier stage in my life. While the toxic culture within the industry is well-documented, much of it remains obscured by abstract narratives and conspiracy theories, with the facts often blurred and elusive.

The "*Muva Hustler*" chapter provides a deeper exploration of the tensions between my entrepreneurial spirit and the materialism and capitalism that permeate the industry. The Hip Hop industry, much like the broader capitalist system, frequently exploits the labour, creativity, and bodies of women, offering financial gain at the cost of spiritual and emotional well-being. This realisation has compelled me to reevaluate my relationship with Hip Hop culture and Rap music, leading to a profound shift in what resonates with me now, I grapple with the contradictions that arise when a culture born out of resistance and creativity becomes co-opted by capitalist forces (Collins, 2000; Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004).

As I reworked this chapter, the cultural landscape of Hip Hop was undergoing a significant shift, exemplified by the  Kendrick Lamar and Drake battle. This conflict was emblematic of the broader struggles within Hip Hop, bringing issues of cultural appropriation, authenticity, and exploitation to the forefront. This period underscored the tension between the commodification of Black culture and the quest for unity and relevance within the community (Rose, 1994; Perry, 2004).

They not like us, they not like us, they not like us

They not like us, they not like us, they not like us

Not Like us – Kendrick Lamar (2024) 

The Female BET Awards, which I observed with a critical eye, often presented a façade of forced female empowerment. While it is essential to celebrate the achievements of Black women in the industry, the spectacle frequently felt contrived, as if empowerment were being commodified and sold back to us in a palatable package. The reality of Black women's experiences in Hip Hop, however, is far more complex and fraught with challenges that are not easily resolved by superficial gestures of recognition (Crawford, 2017; Ford, 2015).

Where do I stand now in my relationship with Hip Hop culture and Rap music? It is a relationship that has evolved, matured, and become more nuanced over time. The music and messages that once resonated with me as a young girl no longer hold the same power in my life. My spiritual connectivity and entrepreneurial spirit have led me down a path that diverges from the materialism and capitalism that dominate much of the current Hip Hop landscape. This shift has also influenced the broader trajectory of my career, as I seek to align my professional pursuits with my deeper values and beliefs.

In writing this chapter, I am acutely aware of the conflicts and contradictions that define my relationship with Hip Hop culture. It is a culture that has indelibly shaped me, but one that I now engage with on my own terms, critically, and with a renewed sense of purpose. My journey from girlhood to womanhood to motherhood has been one of transformation, marked by a growing awareness of the forces that seek to define and confine Black women within the industry. As I continue to navigate these waters, I do so with the knowledge that my identity and place within Hip Hop culture are not fixed, but constantly evolving, shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and creativity.

Shifts in Musical Affinities Reflecting Personal Transformation

*“Just fi mek it fi put food inna my yard
Why Lord? Man out ya like wild dog
Try every likkle ting fi get the coil broad
And every likkle ting you know them fight hard
Father God a when you a go play my card
Jah know, you keep me life guard
Show me the light cah me nuh like fraud
Sometime me feel mi ask fi too much
Jah Jah yah me only strength”*

Triumph, Masika Ft Lil Ike (2023) 

During the interview research process, one participant stated:

“Jamaican culture, morals, and values have deeply shaped my core identity, serving as a critical foundation in my journey as a Black woman and mother. These roots remain more significant to me than Black British or African American culture, despite having moved to England at a young age”. (BFCEM, 35, Birmingham)

The constant negotiation of power, positionality, and finances, coupled with the unique intersection of motherhood and creative entrepreneurship, across places and space impacts both the personally and professionally. Which participants in this research, who similarly navigate transnational identities while pursuing economic survival and agency within hostile social environments experience, using their cultural morals and values as a core guide.

Artists like Masika embody this spirit in their lyrics, where the fight for upward mobility, economic survival, and agency is ever-present. These themes reflect the realities of the wider Black community beyond BFCEMs who, like myself, navigate multiple identities and societal pressures while seeking to thrive in a world that often marginalises us.

Dancehall, much like Hip Hop, functions as a battleground where issues of hypersexuality, misogyny, and violence are laid bare, creating tension around gender roles and power dynamics. Yet within this tension, there is also space for empowerment, where women in Dancehall have redefined notions of power and agency. Women like Spice, Lady Saw, and Shenseea have used their platforms to challenge patriarchal norms and assert their authority, both creatively and entrepreneurially. As Stanley Niaah (2010) highlights, Dancehall culture is a site of contestation where "female performers adopt sexual autonomy and economic empowerment, often through their control of their own image and sexuality" (p. 117). This redefinition of power is not without its contradictions but serves as a crucial avenue for BFCEMs to assert themselves in a male-dominated industry.

As I sit here reflecting on the shifting landscape of this journey of BFCEMs, marked by the constant negotiation of power, position, finances, employment, education, entrepreneurship, and motherhood, I find myself drawn to the raw energy and gritty narratives present in the music that has accompanied me on this journey. The sounds of Dancehall and Hip Hop, with their unapologetic expression of survival against the odds, have been a mirror to my own struggles and triumphs. The lyrics from Masika and Lil Ike's "*Triumph*" encapsulate this journey of survival and the quest for something more, a pursuit that resonates deeply with me as I navigate the many roles I occupy. In these lines, there is a cry for divine intervention amidst a relentless battle for survival, a sentiment that echoes my own experiences as I juggle the demands of life, striving not just to survive, but to thrive.

Dancehall, much like Hip Hop, has always been a space of tension, a battleground where the conflicts between hypersexuality, promiscuity, misogyny, and violence are laid bare. Yet, within this tension, there is also an authenticity that speaks to the lived realities of those who, like many BFCEMs and beyond, are trying to carve out spaces of power and agency in a world that often seeks to marginalise us. The negotiation of these contradictions is central to the way I engage with these musical forms. They offer a raw, unfiltered narrative of the

struggle to ascend from the margins, a struggle that is deeply familiar to me and many others within the Black diaspora.

My relationship with music, however, is not limited to the raw energy of Dancehall and Hip Hop. Noted throughout my journey is a clear relationship with God, a relationship that has often found its expression through gospel music. For many years, Gospel music was confined to the walls of the church, and my engagement with it was limited to that space. But as I began to encounter artists like  Lecrae, Mali Music, and Tasha Cobbs, Todd Galberth something profound began to shift within me. These artists brought a message of hope and joy that transcended the confines of traditional religious settings. Their music provided a spiritual connectivity that had begun to wane in my relationship with Hip Hop.

In the lyrics of Koryn Hawthorne's "*Know You*," I found a new resonance, one that was deeply supportive during the dark times of my life. The song's plea for a deeper connection with the divine, a longing to know and be known by God, spoke to my soul in a way that Hip Hop had once done but no longer did. This shift in my musical affinities mirrored the transformation occurring within me, a move away from the materialism and capitalist excesses that had come to dominate much of the current Hip Hop landscape, and towards a spirituality that sought depth, meaning, and authenticity.

The TDBFE provides a critical framework for understanding these shifts in musical and personal values. My engagement with Dancehall, Hip Hop, and Gospel music is informed by these intersecting identities, of race, gender, and spirituality. Womanism (Walker, 1983), further deepens this understanding by centring the experiences of Black women and their connection to community and spirituality.

Hip Hop feminism (Morgan, 1999) and (Pough, 2004), challenges the often misogynistic and hypersexualised narratives within Hip Hop while reclaiming the genre as a space for Black female empowerment and expression. However, my shift towards Gospel music signifies a departure from the elements of Hip Hop that no longer resonate with my evolving values. This does not mean a complete abandonment of Hip Hop or Dancehall, but rather a reconfiguration of how I engage with these genres. My journey reflects the fluidity of identity and the ways in which our musical preferences are in constant dialogue with our lived experiences and spiritual growth.

The connectivity I feel with Gospel music today is rooted in its ability to provide comfort and hope. As I continue to navigate the complexities of life, I find that music remains a powerful tool for transformation, a means of not only expressing struggles but also of finding solace and strength. The shift in musical affinities reflects a broader shift in life trajectory, one that is

moving away from the external validations of success and towards a deeper, more introspective journey of self-discovery and spiritual fulfilment.

This chapter, therefore, is not just a reflection on my relationship with music but also a wider narrative of transformation. It is a testament to the ways in which Black women and BFCEMs, like myself, use music to navigate the complexities of our lives, finding in it both a mirror to our realities and a source of empowerment and healing. As I continue this journey, I do so with the understanding that my identity, much like the music I listen to, is not static but constantly evolving, shaped by the intersections of race, gender, creativity, and spirituality.

*“I don't wanna live in the shallows
I was made to search the deep
If You're not in it, I don't want it
I want all of You, take all of me

I wanna know You
Really know You
I wanna know You Lord
Nothing matters more

Lead me Lord and I will follow”*

Koryn Hawthorne (2020) 

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has critically examined the intersections of music, identity, and empowerment within the experiences of BFCEM. By engaging with the cultural significance of Hip Hop, Dancehall, and Gospel, it has demonstrated how music serves as a powerful medium for self-expression, resilience, and upward mobility in the face of systemic oppression. The narratives of artists like Masika, alongside the insights of Hip Hop feminists such as Morgan (1999) and Bowen (2021), highlight the complexities that BFCEMs face in navigating societal pressures and achieving agency. The musical journeys, marked by both empowerment and contradiction, illustrate the tension between embracing and resisting commodification within male-dominated and capitalist spaces. This work underscores music's transformative role in shaping entrepreneurial identities and broader sociopolitical landscapes for Black women.

The chapter effectively addresses the core research questions by revealing how SPEC challenges drive Black women into creative entrepreneurship. It explores how BFCEMs from the Jamaican diaspora navigate transatlantic socio-political contexts, achieving positionality and empowerment through cultural resilience and community-building. Furthermore, it demonstrates Hip Hop's influence in reshaping their roles as creative entrepreneurs, highlighting music as a tool for both personal growth and sociopolitical engagement. By critically analysing these dynamics, the chapter meets the aim of illustrating how Black women strategically redefine their roles while resisting systemic barriers.

PHASE 3

Embodied Mastery: Navigating Womanhood, Legacy, & Creative Empowerment in Transatlantic Spaces

Autoethnography



THE LAST DANCE

Keywords: Autoethnography, Black Girl maturation, Other Mothering, God, Black Creativity, Belonging, Femininity

“Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

Psalm 23:6 KJV

Introduction

As the researcher and subject at the centre of this autoethnographic chapter, I introduce an exploration that delves into the multifaceted journey of Black female maturation and its connection to entrepreneurship, particularly within the realm of creative endeavours. The central inquiry driving this investigation revolves around the pivotal question: What critical challenges encountered during Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood have served as catalysts for engaging in creative entrepreneurship?

Embarking on an immersive journey, weaving through the intricate phases of girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood, to unravel the transformative journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Through the interplay of a personal narrative positioned against the broader social, political, economic, and cultural fabric, I endeavour to illuminate the genesis and evolution of creative entrepreneurship out of Black female maturation. This narrative serves as the foundational thread, intricately woven into the tapestry of lived experience spanning from 2002 through 2006, across the vibrant landscapes of New York (USA), Birmingham (UK), and Liverpool (UK).

By situating the thesis within the temporal and spatial dimensions of these pivotal years and diverse locales, I aim to interrogate the pressing issues and nuanced threads of identity formation, entrepreneurial cognition, and spatial dynamics. The exploration seeks to uncover the intrinsic connection between creativity and survival strategies, and the pivotal role they play in shaping the entrepreneurial journey.

While embarking on this autoethnography, it is important to note that each subsequent chapter unfolds as layers of revelation, offering an evolved and comprehensive perspective on the creative entrepreneurial journey. Together, we navigate through the depths of

personal reflection and socio-cultural analysis, illuminating the intersections of creativity, identity, and entrepreneurship within the context of Black female maturation.

This autoethnographic element of the thesis contributes to and expounds upon existing literature surrounding Black female selfhood (Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Kate Millet, and Patricia Williams) each serving as a theoretical scaffolds for understanding the nuanced interconnections between personal narratives and socio-economic contexts of the Black woman's experience. Key themes such as intersectionality, identity politics, and entrepreneurial agency emerge as pivotal lenses through which to examine the multifaceted experiences of Black women in entrepreneurial pursuits.

Drawing upon germinal works by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Sara Ahmed through the lens of the TDBFE, this autoethnographic section elucidates the complex terrain traversed by Black women as they negotiate the intersections of race, gender, motherhood, and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, insights from entrepreneurship theory and spatial studies contribute to a holistic understanding of the contextual factors shaping entrepreneurial endeavours as Black women and mothers, particularly within the realm of creative enterprise, noting that the wider discourse in these areas is beyond the scope of this thesis.

This is a full-length explicitly identified autoethnographic text on the emergence of Black female mothers as creative entrepreneurs. It shows the lived experiences of Black maturation when girlhood, womanhood, motherhood, and creative entrepreneurship are shaped by race, gender, and class, and what role this unique intersection plays when mothers must navigate not only their own but also their children's positions in society, Ferdinand (2022).

This autoethnography leans towards the feminist maxim that "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969), while grounded in the assertion by bell hooks (1989) that such narratives constitute a form of "talking back,". Elucidating how the intersectional experiences of Black women, mothers, creatives, and entrepreneurs are imbued with political significance this method of "Talking Back" can be offered as a form of resistance. Examining key moments in the journey toward Black selfhood and survival entrepreneurship, revealing how socio-economic challenges, including poverty, employment, housing, education, and upward mobility, intersect with personal narratives to shape pathways of expressive and creative pursuit.

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

Mandela, N. (1994) p 624

Rooted in the tradition of autoethnography and sensory ethnography, (Pink, 2013), and (Atkinson et al, 2007) this thesis employs a reflexive and introspective approach to knowledge production, centring my own lived experiences as primary data. Through a process of narrative inquiry and critical self-reflection, I as the researcher navigate the contours of memory, emotion, and interpretation, excavating insights into the formative influences shaping my creative entrepreneurial journey as it emerges through the identified stages of Black female maturation. Complementing this introspective lens is archival research and audio/music providing contextual grounding, elucidating the socio-economic and geographical forces shaping creative entrepreneurial decision-making during the specified timeframe.

By critically engaging and interrogating this autoethnography and sensory ethnography I explore the structural inequalities and systemic barriers that perpetuate implications for Black women through maturation as creative entrepreneurs in theory, practice, and policy. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to explore the transformative potential of autoethnography and sensory ethnography as a tool for personal and political empowerment, and preservation.

Highlighting how storytelling and memory work can catalyse collective action and social justice this autoethnographic section of the wider thesis offers a poignant exploration of Black feminine narratives at the intersection of race, gender, girlhood, and motherhood.

Unveiling the complexities of identity formation and survival within oppressive social, political, economic, and cultural structures are produced when embracing vulnerability, reflexivity, and catharsis, amplifying Black women's voices while bringing nuance to the larger questions and themes on cultural/music influence, creative praxis and entrepreneurship and survival, power, positionality and upward mobility, creating an opportunity to, challenge dominant narratives, and advocate for systemic change.

God(s) (other) Mother.

"If I didn't know God, I would have crumbled a long time ago".

-Nathania Atkinson (2023)

This section of the autoethnography embarks on a critical inquiry into the construction of motherhood and othermothering within the context of intersecting systems of oppression, namely white supremacy, hegemonic norms, and sexism. Grounded in Collins' (2014) framework this chapter sets the stage for an exploration of how mothering and othermothering shape the experiences and identity formation, values, aspirations, and confidence of Black women through various stages of maturation. By centring the voices and experiences of Black women, this chapter seeks to disrupt dominant narratives and illuminate the enduring resilience and creativity of Black maternal practices.

Situating this chapter within the broader theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, and Black feminism, while drawing upon foundational texts by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, the autoethnography presents the unveiling of a journey that elucidates the ways in which systems of oppression intersect to marginalise and constrain Black mothers. In addition, it offers an exploration of Collins' (1987) concept of mothering as a central practice within Black communities, as well as Hirt et al.'s (2008) examination of "othermothering" as a cultural tradition when rooted in resilience and collective care, play a fundamental role in the identity formation within this autoethnography, speaking to the foundational elements the overarching research questions.

Caroline

Aunt Caroline played a pivotal role in my upbringing, particularly during my Easter and summer stays in the Bronx, New York, right off Pelham Parkway. Her home, modest yet filled with warmth and memory, quickly became a sanctuary, a site of cultural grounding and spiritual awakening. Caroline embodied the practice of othermothering with an unwavering commitment to God, a deep sense of familial obligation, and a fierce honesty that nurtured rather than punished. Her faith wasn't performative; it was etched into every act of care.

Each morning, without fail, she rose before dawn, between 4:30 and 5:00 a.m., to pray and worship. This daily devotion was not interrupted by fatigue, difficulty, or the chaos of life. It

was a covenant. Though I did not fully grasp it then, watching her taught me the sacred power of consistency, surrender, and communion. What I witnessed in Caroline became foundational to my own unfolding spirituality.

During those formative years, she introduced me to the intimacy of personal faith, not just through church or Bible class, but through conversation, observation, and quiet presence. At that time, I was grappling with what it meant to believe: I feared that I could never match her certainty, that I might disappoint God with my uncertainty. So, I kept my spiritual journey private, meditating, reading scripture, and quietly seeking God's voice. Still, I felt His presence, a steady source of strength that underpinned my womanhood, creativity, and eventual role as a mother and entrepreneur.

This spiritual inheritance mirrored a broader tradition of Black women's faith. As one BFCEM expressed during our conversations,

"God is the most important part of my journey. If it wasn't for God, I would not be able to move forward to where I want to be." (BFCEM, 40, London)

Such declarations remind us that faith is not only personal but intergenerational, woven into our cultural and emotional DNA.

My relationship with God matured over time, shifting from intellectual curiosity to embodied knowing. Caroline's discipline served as a model, but I learned that my path did not have to mirror hers to be real. I found God in silence, in song, in the rhythm of my breath, and eventually, in the pulse of my own creative voice.

This inner transformation was not disconnected from the outer world. It became critical to how I navigated SPEC challenges. These acts of quiet spiritual reflection embody DEP's focus on diasporic embodied knowledge, an internalised praxis that informs the foundations of selfhood, resilience, and future creative entrepreneurship. " Faith was not a backdrop to my journey; it was the compass, the fire.

As Williams (1993) and Bradley-St-Cyr (2013) observe, the Black Church has long been a space of collective hope and individual empowerment, especially for Black women. Yet this spiritual praxis is not monolithic. For Caroline, a British-born Jamaican woman living in the Bronx, her faith was shaped by multiple diasporic currents. She drew from Black Pentecostal traditions, and her own mother's teachings, often unconsciously enacting what Ross (2003) calls a liberatory theology, one rooted in survival, motherhood, and resistance.

I too came from a complex spiritual landscape: a family immersed in Rastafarianism, Christianity, Hebrew Israelite teachings, and formal Catholic education. But it was Caroline

who asked the question that shifted my soul: “*What does God mean to you?*” It was through her that I learned to seek God not through doctrine, but through relationship.

This spiritual foundation has since informed every domain of my life, from artistic creation to career development and mothering. I came to understand, as Levine (1978) asserts, that Black women have historically adapted scripture not to fit patriarchy, but to address the exigencies of our lives. A tool not of submission, but of liberation, a way to rewrite the script, to see ourselves in the divine.

As my journey continued, the words of Philippians 4:13 “*I can do all things through Him who gives me strength*”, were no longer just recited; they were embodied. They pulsed through each act of creation, each rejection turned into redirection, each moment of fear made holy through faith. Caroline’s early morning prayers became the blueprint for my own form of spiritual discipline.

“I began to find God in myself, and I loved her, I loved her fiercely.”

— Nathania Atkinson (2023)

The Bronx

It was all a dream, I used to read Word Up magazine, Salt and Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine...

“Juicy”- The Notorious B.I.G (1994) 

My time in the Bronx introduced me to a distinct perspective of Black cultural expression intertwined with the dynamics of geographic containment, mobility constraints, and racial segregation (Shabazz, 2021). It marked a pivotal moment in my journey, shaping my identity as a Black girl navigating the complexities of self-expression and self-discovery with the early stages of maturation between girlhood and womanhood.

The Bronx was a vibrant tapestry of Black and Latina communities. The presence of Black and Latino-owned stores was a stark departure from my previous experiences in the UK from the perspective of diversity and inclusion.

The observation of this level of diverse community fuelled my excitement, the omnipresence of music, particularly Hip Hop, underscored the cultural vibrancy of the environment, permeating the streets through storefronts, passing cars, and impromptu performances.

From my earliest recollections, I was attuned to the significance of space and environment, contrasting the landscapes of the Bronx with my upbringing in Birmingham, England. Both locales exposed me to histories of survival, resilience, and activism, laying the groundwork for my evolving self-perception. However, the Bronx felt electric; it felt special. This spatial imagination created a pivotal lens through which I comprehended the intricate interplay of culture, environment, and the positioning and visibility of Black female identities.

In my initial interactions with the Bronx, I felt free to explore each corner, mall, and activity on my own. This sense of freedom stemmed from my naivety and awe of this new space, which was void of Ducre's (2012) explanation of the significant impact that the safety or perilous nature of neighbourhoods like the Bronx and Handsworth have on the lives of Black girls and women. Ducre's work, along with Brown et al.'s (2013) construct of heightened guardedness and the imperative of hypervigilance, highlights the profound influence these environments exert on their inhabitants. I will explore these concepts later in this chapter and throughout the thesis.

Vigilance, hypervigilance, and the negotiation of social and spatial boundaries bring into sharp focus the layered oppressions that Black girls and women endure daily. This oppression is a spectrum, ranging from the violence of adultification and over-policing to the disproportionately high rates of school exclusion, arrests, and surveillance, as highlighted by the National Agenda for Black Girls (2020). These struggles are constant, pervasive, and often invisible to outsiders.

Through the TDBFE this thesis explores how Black girls, women, and mothers navigate and reclaim spaces like The Bronx, New York City, Birmingham, England, and Jamaica, which hold histories of struggle and resilience. Katherine McKittrick (2014) argues that a space tainted by violence, aggression, and sorrow cannot be a space of safety. Yet, many Black girls, women, and mothers, myself included have long learned to navigate these fraught spaces and still find familiarity, comfort, and even joy within them. There's something about the warmth of a familiar face as you walk down the street, helping Nan with her groceries while catching up with every other auntie you pass. It's in the rhythm of everyday life: weaving through local shops, grabbing a patty on the way home, prepping dinner with nanny after shopping, and exchanging laughter with friends as you bump into them on the way to the corner store. Living near the people you love, always within reach of their homes, appearing without call or premade arrangements, fosters a sense of closeness that makes each day full and rich with love and connection.

But the space is fragile. A sunny day can shift into chaos, a shooting, followed by a sinister silence that cloaks the neighbourhood in unease. A joyful night at a club, or BBQ, with

champagne toasts and smoke blowing to the sky, women whining their hips and twerking, and men standing in observation in dark corners, some with dark shades, gaps pulled low or balaclavas disguising their identity, can suddenly transform into rushed exits and brawls rooted in community tensions, gang politics, and the omnipresence of police. In these streets, hierarchies among men and women form, built on perceived wealth, power, respect, and style. Including luxury cars, designer clothes, alliances, and reputations shaping the social order. Loyalty, loss, and legacy become the currency of survival, each person navigating the same space but arriving at vastly different outcomes, death, jail, addiction, betrayal, 9-to-5 jobs, pregnancies, and first loves locked behind bars.

When I sit with this paradox, it becomes clear that the dual nature of these physical spaces, oppressive yet deeply familiar, forms the foundation for resilience in Black girls and women. Our safety is not found in the absence of danger but in the way, we navigate intersecting forces of violence, racism, sexism, classism, and political and economic constraints. We weave laughter, love, fearlessness, tears, and an unhealthy normalisation of trauma into a tapestry of survival. These hostile environments become bubbles of safety, where community, family, and friends, rooted in long-term relationships, create a unique sense of belonging only understood by those who have lived this reality.

For me, growing up in Handsworth, Birmingham, was formative. The environment shaped how I, as a young Black girl, woman, and mother, see myself, my future, and my possibilities. It taught me fearlessness and how to build bonds bound on respect, loyalty and being a person of your word. Long before I ever stepped into creative and entrepreneurial spaces. While McKittrick's assertion that violence negates safety holds some truth, these spaces also cultivate survival tactics, resilience, and a fighting spirit essential for identity formation.

The TDBFE becomes essential here, as it captures the intersecting forces that shape the lives of Black girls, women, and mothers. It provides a lens through which we can understand how they transform unsafe, violent spaces into sites of innovation, self-reclamation, and community. These environments, while undeniably dangerous, paradoxically become fertile grounds for creativity and entrepreneurship. They are at once homely and invigorating, cultivating a unique mastery that intertwines the personal with the political, the domestic with the public, and the oppressive with the aspirational.

In this tension lies the very essence of Black resilience, a constant reimagining of what is possible in the face of relentless adversity.

Recent literature deepens this exploration of Black resilience, particularly in the context of hostile environments like ghettos and the spatial dynamics navigated by Black girls and

women. Scholars such as Christina Sharpe (2016), Saidiya Hartman (2019), and Akwugo Emejulu (2022) focus on the complex interplay of survival, resistance, and identity formation within these spaces. Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) investigates the persistent effects of racial violence, illustrating how Black women navigate life "in the wake" of these conditions. Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019) examines how Black women in urban settings resist societal constraints, offering radical reimagining of freedom and joy amidst adversity. Emejulu's *Fugitive Feminism* (2022) emphasises how Black women subvert oppressive structures through collective acts of defiance and resilience, transforming hostile spaces into pockets of empowerment and care.

Hall (1993: 135) poignantly articulates that identity emerges at the intersection of personal narratives and historical context. This autoethnography seeks to challenge the notion that mere survival in marginalised neighbourhoods constitutes success. Instead, it acknowledges the profound historical legacies of places like the Bronx and Handsworth, which have served as refuges and sites of resistance for Black communities grappling with systemic oppression. These legacies instil a mentality of resilience, empowerment, and legacy.

Both the Bronx (USA) and Handsworth (UK) have roots deeply embedded in a rich history, serving as havens for Black communities seeking refuge from the grip of neo-slavery and systemic racism in the American South, or those who migrated through the Windrush generation in pursuit of a fresh start and empowerment. (I will explore more detail about the rich history and cultural significance of Handsworth in the chapter "*I am My Father's Daughter*")

*"If you ain't never been to the ghetto,
Don't ever come to the ghetto,
'Cause you wouldn't understand the ghetto,
So stay the fuck out of the ghetto.."*

Treach, "Everything's Gonna Be Alright (Ghetto Bastard)," from *Naughty by Nature's Naughty By Nature*, (1991)

Within the context of the transatlantic Black feminist epistemology, the rise of Hip Hop in the 1970s Bronx becomes a significant moment for understanding Black female creativity and resistance. The emergence of figures like Debbie D, MC Sha-Rock, Lisa Lee (1977), and Sylvia Robinson is not merely a historical footnote in Hip Hop's rise but a vital contribution to what would become a global cultural movement. These women laid the groundwork for future generations of Black female rappers and executives who would challenge not only the

male-dominated Hip Hop landscape but also the broader racialised and gendered power structures that sought to marginalise their contributions.

The 1970s Bronx block parties were more than just sites of musical innovation; they were spaces where young Black girls and women navigated the intersecting forces of racism, sexism, and classism. Hip Hop feminism allows us to explore how these women carved out spaces of power and influence within an environment fraught with socio-economic challenges, police brutality, and systemic marginalisation. This connects to the broader framework of transatlantic Black feminist thought, which situates Black women's creativity and entrepreneurship within a lineage of resistance, survival, and cultural innovation that spans continents and centuries.

Sylvia Robinson's role as the founder of Sugar Hill Records and her influence in producing the seminal track "The Message" (1982) by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five is especially noteworthy. Robinson, often dubbed the "mother of Hip Hop," exemplifies how Black women have shaped and commercialised Hip Hop, often working behind the scenes to ensure its success. Her role as a Black woman in the music industry parallels the experiences of other Black female creatives and entrepreneurs across the transatlantic, who have navigated both visible and invisible labour in creative industries in a contemporary timeline.

As the chapter "*Rhythms of Resistance*" explored in great depth, the evolution of Hip Hop, and its connectivity to my personal identity, hustler attitude and creative and entrepreneurial journey, in which female rappers played a significant role. TDBFE incorporation of Hip Hop feminism invites us to look at these contributions through a gendered lens, understanding that the challenges and triumphs of Black women in Hip Hop mirror the broader struggles of Black women in diasporic and ghetto spaces. These women redefined what it means to be both Black and female in the public sphere, using Hip Hop as a tool for expression, entrepreneurship, and cultural reclamation.

The sound, energy, and visuals of early hip hop in the '80s and early '90s were unlike anything I had ever encountered before. The beat was raw and unrelenting, pulsing through the air like a heartbeat that vibrated through your entire body. Booming basslines, breakbeats, and the scratch of vinyl records were the backdrop to lyrics that were at once rebellious, celebratory, and unapologetic. The sound was gritty and alive, as though each beat carried the weight of streets I knew well but had never heard reflected in music before. One of the most powerful scenes was the amalgamation of Chaka Khan's "Ain't Nobody"  (1983) over a dance scene in the *Film Breakin* (1984), although this song was not "hip hop" the beat, the rhythmic patterns would steal my heart forever. Followed by the opening

scenes of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1990) coupled with Public Enemies *Fight the Power* (1990)  and Rosie Perez dancing.

There was an electric energy in the air, the kind that made you want to move, to claim space on the dance floor. The visuals were equally captivating, graffiti that exploded in vivid colours across crumbling walls, the smooth athleticism and creativity of breakdancers spinning and flipping, their bodies defying gravity. It felt liberating, sexy, and dangerous all at once. The boldness of the fashion, oversized jackets, gold chains, large gold bamboo earrings, gold teeth limited sneakers, and hats tilted just right, was more than just a look; it was an attitude, a style, a declaration of confidence and defiance. It was connected to something bigger, something that felt untouchable yet completely mine. I was something I could use to show up in my full expression.

As a young Black girl, experiencing this was like a revelation. I could feel parts of myself stirring pieces of my identity I hadn't yet fully claimed. It was as if a fire had been lit inside of me, a beam of light trying to burst out of my chest, refusing to be contained. Hip hop mirrored back to me a version of myself that was bold, unafraid, and ready to take on the world. It was more than music; it was an awakening.

I could envision myself dancing, singing, rapping, creating new looks, and expressing myself at every opportunity. It was evident that the Bronx had made New York City the home of a cultural movement that emerged against the backdrop of racial and economic segregation, mass incarceration, and joblessness (Shabazz, 2017) And I was experiencing this ever-evolving act of cultural production and creative praxis as an act of resistance and resilience in real-time in my life, my world.

The Bronx, exposed me to an early depiction of Black cultural production, informed by cultural geographic political experience (Anderson, 2017) and social and spatial conditions in which Black life is lived (Wilkins, 2006). However, this early depiction over the years would illuminate the continuous and evolving challenges faced by Black girls and women of the diaspora.

The cultural and lived experiences of Black girls in the UK and the USA share deep historical and contemporary parallels, both shaped by enduring legacies of systemic racism, colonialism, and patriarchal oppression. From the early 20th century to the present, Black girls across the Atlantic have faced forms of discrimination that are rooted in racial capitalism and colonial histories. Whether in the context of the USA's segregationist policies or the UK's post-Windrush social exclusion, institutions in both countries have consistently failed to fully acknowledge the humanity of Black girls, framing them through lenses of misbehaviour,

inferiority, or hyper-sexualisation (Davis & Ernst, 2020). This has left lasting scars in education, healthcare, and policing, with Black girls disproportionately targeted and marginalised.

In both the USA and the UK, educational systems reflect these deeply ingrained biases. In the USA, Black girls are nearly six times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions compared to their white peers (National Agenda for Black Girls, 2021), while in the UK, exclusion rates for Black Caribbean students are up to six times higher than those for white students (The Guardian, 2021). These disciplinary disparities stem from long-standing stereotypes that view Black girls as needing less nurturing, less protection, and less support, contributing to their adultification. This adultification bias, as noted by Epstein, Blake, & González (2017), casts Black girls as more independent, more knowledgeable about adult topics, and more sexually aware, leading to heightened scrutiny and punitive measures.

The healthcare disparities faced by Black girls and women in both regions further highlights these challenges. In the USA, Black women are nearly three and a half times more likely to die from pregnancy complications than white women (National Agenda for Black Girls, 2021). Similarly, in the UK, maternal death rates among Black women are statistically three times higher than those of their white counterparts (2020-2022). These statistics are not just numbers but a reflection of the systemic neglect and devaluation of Black lives, particularly Black female lives, across both societies.

Despite these structural challenges, the resilience and creativity of Black girls in both the USA and the UK serve as a powerful counterforce. Sam Jury-Dada, in her work on race, gender, and the arts, emphasises how Black girls, though underrepresented in cultural production, remain central to contemporary cultural movements in both Britain and the United States. Their stories, often told through the lens of art and storytelling, offer platforms for visibility and empowerment. This expression of resistance highlights their determination to fight and win against continuous oppression, showcasing resilience through creative outlets that challenge dominant narratives (Jury-Dada, 2021).

The hidden truth, however, lies in the understanding that these geographical locations are more similar than different when it comes to the systemic oppression Black girls face. While there may be subtle differences in the methods of marginalisation, both the USA and the UK project harmful ideas that Black girls are less in need of care, comfort, and support. Yet, amidst this oppression, there remains a burning desire within Black girls to resist, express themselves, and rise above, using creativity as a form of resilience and a tool for rewriting their own narratives.

Despite the challenges faced by Black girls and Black communities, there was an undeniable sense of faith, hustle, and survival that had transformed into a unique source of power. This resilience carved out a path to freedom. One that was loud, unapologetic, original, and bold, aligning with Katherine McKittrick's (2006) concept that "Black matters are spatial matters." Despite the geographical and socio-economic challenges, an undercurrent of courageous, aspirational energy persisted, driving the pursuit of a better life. This drive wasn't ignited by any single event, but rather by an amalgamation of visual and emotional experiences: witnessing joy and laughter in my parents as they worked towards their dreams, as detailed in the photo ethnography chapter of this thesis. It was fuelled by the inspirational and aspirational conversations I overheard, and by the words of wisdom and possibility my father continuously spoke into and over my life. The music that filled our home, with lyrics of hope and potential, further shaped my point of view. It gave me the freedom to be uniquely individual, and to believe I could become anything I desired. This was the essence of Hip Hop culture, the culture I fell deeply in love with, one that offered liberation through self-expression, resilience, and unapologetic authenticity.

*I rock rough and stuff with my Afro Puffs
(Rock on, wit cha bad self)
I rock on with my bad self 'cause it's a must
It's the Lady Of Rage still kickin' up dust
So umm, let me loosen up my bra strap
And umm, let me boost ya with my raw rap,*

"Afro Puffs"- Lady of Rage (1994) 

New York Summers

It was the summer of 2002, Nelly's "it is getting hot in here" had only been out a few months and I had returned to New York for the summer break. Like any other trip I would go to the mall, and the Bronx Zoo, occasionally go with Caroline to work and just exist happily in New York absorbing the energy, watching *106 & Park* (2000-2014) for my music needs, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990-1996) *In the House* (1995- 1999), *Moesha*, (1996-2001) any Black sitcom that was on I watched. I loved seeing Young Beautiful Black people on the TV their family life, and teenage life it was all so relatable. Unlike England where there were no Black shows or very old American sitcom seasons. These shows showcased Black characters navigating personal and professional challenges with cultural authenticity,

offering much-needed visibility and empowerment. As Hall (1997) argues, representation is fundamental to identity formation, constructing meanings that shape how marginalised groups perceive themselves in wider cultural contexts. For me, these portrayals offered validation and affirmation, filling a void left by the absence of nuanced Black representation in the UK, beyond the scope of my immediate family and community.

In contrast, Black representation in British media, as Sobande (2024) highlights, was and although improving, remains limited, tokenistic, outdated, and I add focused on Black pain and trauma failing to capture the diversity and complexity of Black British lives. While U.S. media, despite its flaws, offered a "Black gaze" (Campt, 2021) creating space for authentic narratives. British media has struggled to reflect the multiplicity of Black identities, reinforcing a sense of cultural invisibility. This disparity underscores the broader transatlantic divide in media representation, where U.S. cultural production has historically been more inclusive of Black narratives, providing aspirational figures and community spaces.

Moreover, U.S. media has acted as a site of "Afro-nostalgia" (Ahad-Legardy, 2021), celebrating Black joy, resilience, and cultural expression, creating a sense of belonging for diasporic communities. By contrast, British media's neglect of Black stories highlights a lack of investment in inclusive storytelling, further marginalising Black communities in the UK. This critical difference in representation has profound implications for identity formation, particularly for Black audiences who, like myself, sought affirmation and connection through American media when British media failed to offer meaningful representation.

Following this trip to New York presented a twist. I met with a friend of Aunt Caroline's whom she worked with, a bold, funny lady with a street energy to her, bold-coloured clothing, short hair, and gold jewellery. We spoke and shortly after she invited me to a "Block Party." Of course, I said yes. I met with her, and we went to her home which was in the projects in Brooklyn, as I walked beside her quietly as she joyfully spoke and gave me information about where we would be going later the evening, I just walked quietly but eagerly, taking in the high rise buildings, Brooklyn seemed quite different to the Bronx we walked through courtyards which were filled with people as there was some sort of procession happening, reminiscent of Caribbean carnival so it was extremely busy and then we entered the entrance to the type of high rises you see in the movies, small lifts, and terrible smells. As she opened the door to what was a small apartment that was clearly crowded, there was a curtain making a bedroom in the living room, there was extra furniture in the space on top of existing furniture, and there were clothes hung up on the doors. I thought of how vulnerable, open, and sure this lady was about herself to let me into a very private part of who she was, which was not a normal practice coming from England, instead, I was used to people being

quite secretive, guarded about their home/private life especially if it did not reflect a standard of living they were confident in. So, I respected and trusted her at that moment.

She changed clothes and we headed to the Block party, it was full, there were all age groups, young teenagers like myself, some who may have looked older and been younger, young guys who looked like basketball players, rappers, dancers, young girls replicating foxy brown and Lil Kim, and everyone had on and all the labels Coogi, baby phat, DKNY, Avirex air force 1's, and basketball jerseys. As the night went on she introduced me to who for now we will call C, he was handsome, Brown skinned, with distinct eyes, tattoos on his arms and a little cheeky as he told me I had a cute face but a bit thick (but that's a topic for later). He was nice-looking. He had the temperament of the guys around the hood where I lived in Handsworth, quietly confident, which was fine, I just took it in my stride, and I could tell that my calmness and lack of being impressed by his looks and American accent were intriguing to him. After talking and laughing for a while we danced and when Nelly's "Hot in Here" (2002)  came on" the entire crowd went wild, then ...

BANG, BANG, BANG.

The crowd dispersed, people were screaming and hiding behind the makeshift bar, which is where I ended up, my mind started to observe what was happening, was anyone hurt, where was Chinx and the women I came with, my mind was trying to take it all in it was broken by sirens.

That was the end of that night but the beginning of an American dating experience.

"I wanna know your name, I wanna know if you've got a man, I want to know everything, I want to know your number and if I can come over?"

Mario, *Just a Friend* (2002) 

The next day C contacted Miss M (we will call her) and she contacted me, the next thing you know I was getting ready for a date. He parked outside, and Caroline walked me to the car and gave him the threatening parent speech. She walked right up to his car window, told him to roll it down, looked him straight in the eye then said *"If anything happens to her, I will hunt you down"*. I spent the rest of the summer dating, going to the movies, dinner, and hanging out, we went to the Olive Garden numerous times, and he would order for me, which caught me off guard as I was not used to that, or dating in general, we went to his neighbourhood, the movies, walks, Madame Tussauds in the buzzing and busy centre of Manhattan. It felt surreal and in complete opposition to my life in the UK, it was a friendship that evolved into adulthood.

This was my home, at least it felt like it, and I could not wait to return to it. I was forming a parallel life there and from a cultural perspective gave me a greater sense of belonging than the day-to-day wider culture I experienced in England. New York provided a space for me to be unapologetic, it fuelled my wanting to be fearless and free to become, and it sold me the American dream. I believed that the person I wanted to become was possible in New York because some version of it already existed. I do not know if it was the lights in Manhattan and Broadway, the fast pace of people moving with what seemed like intention, walking through the mall or a movie set and being offered a job, seeing all types of material luxury from cars to clothes. Or even being able to talk loudly and laugh with the audience and their adlibs in the movie theatre, watching people dance on the train or being complimented at any given point in the day. Whatever it was, I felt seen, I felt valuable, I felt like I was someone important.

The environment in which I grew up, Handsworth (B21), Birmingham, was characterised by a pervasive sense of violence, struggle, and systemic disenfranchisement. Gang shootings, death, substance abuse and the enduring trauma of Black pain became tragically normalised. These harsh realities were deeply embedded in the intersections of poverty, systemic racism, and the socio-political dynamics of “Ghetto” life. Together, they fuelled patterns of joblessness and marginalisation, creating an atmosphere that profoundly shaped the lived experiences of Black communities. Yet, to reduce Black British girlhood to these conditions alone risks perpetuating a one-dimensional narrative, which obscures the full complexity of Black girls’ lives. While these adversities are undeniable, they are not the sole defining features of Black girlhood.

Keisha Bruce’s analysis of *Rocks* (2019) offers a nuanced reading of Black British girlhood as inherently relational and collective. She argues that, even within oppressive contexts, Black girls create spaces of joy and resistance, contesting adultification and stereotypes (Bruce, 2024). This agency closely aligns with Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectionality, which clarifies how overlapping identities, race, gender, class, intensify marginalisation. I have lived this complexity: my own formative years, shaped by familial responsibility and social scrutiny, demanded that I resist reductive narratives and build identity on my own terms. Grassroots initiatives like Zeal Contemporary and X3I, spaces I created and shaped, prioritised sisterhood, creativity, and empowerment, becoming vital sites where Black girlhood, creativity, and entrepreneurship are reimagined.

Spatial theory further clarifies this dynamic. McKittrick’s (2006) claim that “Black matters are spatial matters” reorients how I understand my experiences in Birmingham’s inner city, not only as trauma, but as a terrain for creative resilience. Like Ebinehita Iyere and Sofia Akel

document in their research, what are often described as “marginal” spaces were, for me, incubators of solidarity and worldbuilding. Through collective care, my peers and I transformed these urban landscapes, resisting invisibility and constructing new realities through creative acts.

TDBFE provides the analytical lens for examining both the structural forces and intimate strategies that shaped my own journey. Rather than view Black girlhood as a simple path to adulthood, TDBFE insists on its status as an epistemology, a lived, embodied form of knowledge (Brown, 2009). My encounters, from Birmingham to New York, were marked by both shared global legacies of colonialism and uniquely local negotiations of identity, belonging, and resistance.

The distinctions between Black girlhood in the UK and US, navigating denied Britishness or the legacy of enslavement, are not abstract; I felt them firsthand, moving between the limiting narratives of Handsworth and the aspirational energy of New York. Hirsch (2018) describes how national belonging is withheld from Black girls in Britain, a reality that mirrored my own alienation and motivated my pursuit of new possibilities. Conversely, the American context, with its fraught mythology of the “American Dream”, offered, for a time, an imagined escape from these constraints, a dream that today appears delusional.

Empirical studies converge on this lived reality: Black girls in Britain disproportionately face school exclusion, violence, and institutional neglect, but nonetheless deploy strategies of resistance and collective resilience often ignored by mainstream discourse (Agenda Alliance, 2022).

Della Porta and Diani’s (1999) dialogic theory of identity is visible in my life: every step toward self-determination involved negotiating the projections and stereotypes imposed by institutions, media, and even allies. The ghetto, for me, was both a crucible of struggle and a space of ambition, a reality Collins (2000) highlights in her analysis of Black feminist thought, where marginality itself becomes the ground for unique forms of resistance and empowerment.

Entrepreneurship emerged, in my experience, not just as economic strategy but as a mode of escape, self-determination, and world-building, a way to refuse both material and psychological confinement. James Baldwin’s insight, that “to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage, almost all of the time”, captures not only the frustration, but the radical potential of living with that awareness.

Aligned with this legacy, my autoethnography rejects reductive explanations and foregrounds the complex, multi-layered socio-political structures that shape Black girlhood

and creative entrepreneurship. In the context of TDBFE and Black feminist thought, these are not merely individual responses to oppression, but collective, world-building strategies, linking survival, resilience, and entrepreneurship as essential practices of liberation.

Black Creativity

"I get blown away by chord progressions that make me feel something I have never felt before, chords are like coordinates that send me to a place."

Pharell (2022)

The term "*Black expressive culture*," as coined by Addison Gayle Jr. in his anthology *The Black Aesthetic* (1972), encapsulates the multifaceted creative output of Black individuals, serving both as entertainment and as powerful vehicles for protest during times of societal upheaval or solace during periods of mourning.

Throughout history, Black creativity has often been intrinsically linked to political resistance. Amiri Baraka emerged as a prominent theorist within the Black arts movement of the 1960s, advocating for art that prioritised social relevance and originality, challenging the norms of mainstream American artistic expression (Gladney, M. J., 1995). Baraka advocated for a new aesthetic for Black art, envisioning the Black artist as contributing to the dismantling of the existing social order (Baraka, 1966). His efforts culminated in the establishment of the Black Arts Theatre in Harlem, utilising dramatic arts as a potent weapon in the struggle for Black liberation from the pervasive effects of racism (Bailey, P. A., 1983).

Similarly, figures like Carmichael emphasised the importance of recognising and cherishing the unique value of Black people, cultures, and communities (Carmichael, 1967). By the 1970s the genre of Hip Hop emerged as a prominent medium and representation through which issues such as racism, education, sexism, drug use, and spiritual upliftment were addressed (Gladney, M. J., 1995).

Historically and to the present day, Black creatives, have emerged from challenging urban environments, and have transformed their surroundings into vibrant hubs of artistic expression which contribute to their identity formation. In cities like New York, B-girls, B-boys, emcees, DJs, and visual artists have utilised public spaces such as subway trains, stations, walls, parks, and abandoned buildings as canvases for the expression of hip-hop culture (Shabazz, R., 2017).

My introduction to Hip Hop culture and Black creativity, which "made me feel something and sent me to a place" (Pharrell, 2022), emerged during the formative years of the '90s and

early 2000s. This era of Hip Hop shaped my identity as I navigated college, prepared for university, and immersed myself in dance several days a week outside of education. Dance became central to my self-expression, allowing me to communicate emotions and experiences that words could not capture. For Black girls, dance has historically been a vital form of creative expression and resistance, offering a physical space to assert identity and reclaim narratives in the face of systemic silencing (Boylorn, 2017). Scholars like Hagan (2024) and DeFrantz (2004) argue that dance provides an embodied language that is deeply tied to cultural, social, and political movements, particularly for Black girls and women who have used their bodies to resist oppression and assert agency.

Hip Hop, in particular, allowed me to connect with a broader cultural movement that emphasised storytelling through movement, rhythm, and improvisation. DeFrantz (2004, p. 67) highlights how "the Black dancing body becomes a site of knowledge and power."

As I returned to New York for another summer, my exploration of the dance scene led me to the renowned institutions Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey. Amidst the beauty of Black dance bodies, I found myself grappling with feelings of imposter syndrome. Sitting in the waiting area at Alvin Ailey, surrounded by grace and strength, I couldn't shake the doubts that had haunted me since my experiences at home in the UK, I questioned my worthiness, my body feeling inadequate in comparison to the dancers around me. Instead of pursuing my dream, of applying and hoping for an audition, I succumbed to self-doubt and settled for taking classes, making excuses for myself and others. On the way back to the Bronx I spoke to Chinx on the train and made excuses about international fees, the truth was I didn't even think I was good enough to try.

I was not sure if I could be the dancer that existed in the circle Frantz Fanon describes as "The circle of the dance, the permissive circle: one that protects and permits, deciphered, as the huge effort to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. Without limits" (Fanon, 1961 p. 57) but I did understand that at this moment my curvy body did not match up to the dance bodies I had admired, strong and defined bodies nothing like the western dance bodies we had become familiar with in contemporary, ballet dance spaces. But my body did not fit the Western standards either, my body would be another thing I would have to navigate through my girlhood, and it would follow me into womanhood.

In response to this experience, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of the Black body in dance, serving as an embodiment of spirituality, resilience, and creativity. The body and spirit are often inseparable, shaping both individual and collective identities. This connection aligns with my own journey of self-discovery, as I came to understand my body's role within a larger spiritual and cultural context. The unfolding of this experience prompted me to

reflect on how Black female bodies have endured centuries of racial and gendered oppression, from the traumas of the Middle Passage to their objectification in contemporary media and popular culture (Strings, 2019).

Dance has always been integral to the Black diasporic experience, functioning as a powerful form of resistance and expression (Thorpe, 2023). Yet, the portrayal of Black women's bodies remains fraught with exploitation, echoing the historical dehumanisation of figures like Sara Baartman, whose legacy of objectification continues to inform modern representations. As this thesis explores, these ongoing dynamics of race, gender, and embodiment will be critically unpacked in later chapters.

Judith Jamison's choreographic work, "*Divining*", continues to shed light and challenge perceptions of the Black female body in dance, asserting its rightful place alongside Euro-centric aesthetics. However, I would come to learn that despite the lack of visibility and recognition, Black women would continue to shape the landscape of dance, from classical ballet to contemporary Hip-Hop, challenging exclusion and the perpetuating of stereotypes that marginalise Black dancers.

This analysis directly addresses the research questions by highlighting how Black girls and women's engagement in dance and creative spaces serves as a means to navigate systemic and SPEC challenges, fostering both individual identity formation and collective empowerment. Through the lens of Hip Hop culture and Black expressive arts, the thesis examines how these cultural practices influence Black female creative entrepreneurs, enabling them to resist oppression and reshape their roles within transatlantic socio-political contexts. This critical reflection on the body, race, and gender intricately ties into the thesis's broader aims of exploring the relationship between the body, empowerment and upward mobility for Black women.

DANCE Pre 2002.

We nod our heads, rock our necks, tilt our heads, and pause. We shake our shoulders, throw them back and forth, bounce breasts. ... We rhythmically hefty shake our rear ends, our tummies duck and peer, our legs quick march, slow march, tap dribble, quiver and tremble while our feet perform feasts. "Dance!" What a world of emotions that word calls forth in us - D. K. Chisiza

Moore, Katrina Thompson and Kwakiutl L. Dreher. (2023)

Navigating Exclusion, Identity, and the Male Gaze: My Journey Through Dance and Black Girlhood

During my Black girlhood experience, I navigated the complexities of identity and belonging through my involvement in a community dance class. Introduced to hip-hop fused with professional contemporary technique. I entered this space with nervous excitement, hoping to find a sense of connection and expression in a dance style I had admired from afar through music videos entertainment shows and live performances. However, my experience soon became a stark confrontation with the realities of exclusion and marginalisation within female social dynamics.

Despite the talent I cultivated within the dance troupe and the allure of performing, I struggled with deep imposter syndrome and an overwhelming sense of alienation. My body, darker and curvier, didn't align with the slender, more accepted physiques of the other girls. Sabrina Strings (2019) explains that Black women's bodies, especially those that don't conform to Eurocentric standards, are often rendered "unfit" within mainstream beauty and artistic spaces. This dissonance became painfully clear in the troupe, where our shared Blackness wasn't enough to bridge the gap between me and them.

Their coldness didn't bother me as much as the questions it provoked, why was I excluded, and why did my body feel like it was betraying me? In reflection, I believed that my exclusion was based on my choice of dance style although to Hip Hop music and how I existed within the world they had created. This feeling of being on the periphery, of being out of place despite sharing a cultural and artistic lineage, has continued to shape my understanding of identity, belonging, and exclusion throughout my life

Twice a week, I attended dance training in Birmingham, UK, where I navigated the dynamics of a street dance class that appropriated Hip Hop culture in its own way. Despite the focus on Hip Hop, the space was constricted by preconceived ideas of what dance should look like, adhering to rigid routines and group conformity. My approach to dance, which blended contemporary techniques with the self-expressive nature of Hip Hop, was often misunderstood. This experience contrasted sharply with the freedom of expression I found in New York. In the birthplace of Hip Hop, dance was not about fitting into a prescribed mould but about celebrating individual style and movement. As DeFrantz (2004) notes, "Hip Hop culture insists on the personal voice, one that speaks through the body," a principle that I experienced firsthand in New York's vibrant dance spaces.

The difference between these two spaces, one restrictive, the other liberating, highlighted the ways in which dance culture in the UK can distort the essence of Hip Hop. While Birmingham's class appropriated the outward aesthetics of the culture and did great

performances, it lacked the foundational value of personal freedom that defines Hip Hop at its core (Chang, 2005). This contrast deepened my understanding of dance as not merely physical movement but as a spatial and cultural practice shaped by the values embedded in its surrounding environment.

In retrospect, this early encounter with exclusion and judgment shaped my understanding of power dynamics and social hierarchies within female spaces. Labelled as "spoilt" or "stuck up," my quiet demeanour and distinct style were met with derision, dismissed as "dancing funny" in an environment that valued imitation over innovation. Despite my resilience in what was an uncomfortable space for me paired with the lingering questions of "why" that echoed within me, I continued to attend prompting a deeper interrogation of my own identity, and belonging, within the complexities of these non-familial female relationships.

Under the guidance of the mother of the two sisters who ran the dance group, I was provided with a profound source of inspiration and empowerment as it pertained to standing in my individuality and independence as she encouraged me to continue in my own lane and asserted that I was going to become something special.

In reflection, I can say the eldest sister's aesthetic inspired me, embodying a representation of femininity that reflected my experiences of curvy, dark-skinned Black bodies like my own. Her tall, curvaceous, and exquisitely beautiful form exuded unapologetic confidence and allure, reminiscent of the video vixens I admired in Hip Hop music videos and Caribbean culture. This echoes the video vixen aesthetic, a hyper visible yet complex site where Black bodies, as discussed by Morgan (1999) and Durham (2012), are framed both as objects of desire and as powerful agents of self-expression within the politics of Black beauty standards.

Witnessing her performances, I was captivated by her ability to command attention with her sex appeal, boldness, and unapologetic ownership of her body. In her presence, I found validation and a newfound belief that as a dark-skinned, curvy Black woman in England, I too could assert my identity and claim my space with pride. The complexity of her femininity intrigued me, prompting me to observe her closely and emulate her practices.

Determined to embody the same level of confidence and energy, I dedicated myself wholeheartedly to practice. Immersing myself in the rhythms of songs like  KutKlose's "Get Up On It" and Busta Rhymes' "Woo Hah," 702 "Steelo", I studied their nuances and allowed their energy to consume me in reflection this was my first intentional use of my body and spirit moving in alignment and responding to the energy of the music. I became one with the music, channelling its intensity onto the stage with every performance.

As I honed my skills, I became the embodiment of the girl they couldn't ignore. Despite still facing resistance from some of the other girls, who perhaps still did not understand my newfound confidence even as an outsider, I continued to command the stage with unwavering determination finally recognising my potential. The mother of our dance teachers remarked, "She is one to watch," unknowingly affirming the transformative journey that lay ahead for me.

Throughout my girlhood, dance became my anchor, empowering me to cultivate strength and resilience amid adversity, using my body as a vessel for emotional and spiritual expression. Dance, like Hip Hop culture, enabled me to embrace the power of embodied performance as a site of resistance and self-creation. This parallels Payne's (2024) argument that Black girls navigate and redefine their gendered racial identities through Hip Hop's aesthetic forms. As I crafted my own brand of femininity, rooted in authenticity and unapologetic self-expression, I found empowerment in using movement to defy limiting stereotypes of Black womanhood.

"Back straight, eyes up, shoulders back, walk with intention and smile."

Nathania Atkinson, Pre performance mantra.

The dance troupe "*Higher Ground*" epitomised Black expressive culture, showcasing music, dance, and fashion in ways that created a sense of collective identity (DeFrantz, 2018). Yet, despite my involvement, I consistently felt on the periphery. My dance style, an eclectic mix inspired by icons such as Josephine Baker, Katherine Dunham, Paula Abdul, Rosie Perez, Laurieann Gibson and Janet Jackson, further distanced me from the troupe's aesthetic, which celebrated a more uniform expression of Black girlhood. This blend of styles, influenced by both British and American performance traditions, placed me at odds with the expectations within the troupe and exposed internal community tensions.

With that said diversity, inclusion, and belonging (DIB) has extensively explored the emotional toll of exclusion in predominantly white spaces (Block et al., 2022), but there remains a significant gap in understanding how these dynamics operate within Black communities. Black girls like myself often face exclusion based on factors such as classism, colourism, and sizeism, which create hierarchical structures that marginalise certain individuals even within culturally protective environments (Crenshaw, 2019; Hunter & Robinson, 2021). This internalised exclusion perpetuated judgments and reinforced the

complexities of belonging, complicating what it meant for me to participate in Black girlhood in this space.

Additionally, I was challenged and experienced discomfort in how the male gaze toward us as young Black girls in dance, as we would sometimes be subjected to young boys and men descending on our dance classes and watching in awe. Although the thought of hyper sexualisation of Black girls' bodies were not present to me at the time, I knew I did not feel right and in turn what should have been a safe space for Black girls became a site of voyeurism rather than a site of empowerment (Epstein et al., 2017; Payne, 2024). This further limited the scope for my self-expression but also reinforced harmful stereotypes that constrain how our bodies are perceived, policed and exploited.

This section responds to the research questions by illustrating the socio-cultural challenges of exclusion and marginalisation Black girls face, specifically within dance spaces, and how these experiences shape their identity and creative practices. It discusses systemic issues such as the male gaze, colourism, classism, and sizeism, aligning with the research aim to explore how Black girls navigate their positionality and empowerment. It also touches on how Hip Hop culture acts as a catalyst for self-expression and resilience, contributing to the broader understanding of its role in shaping entrepreneurial identity among Black girls and women.

Navigating Dance, Racism, and Creative Self-Discovery: A Journey Through Higher Education and the Arts

Studying dance and performing arts at college provided me with a platform to further explore and refine my artistic voice. As the only Black girl among my peers, I trained in diverse dance styles including Jazz, Contemporary, Ballet, and Freestyle. I confronted the challenges of representation and acceptance again but this time in a predominantly white formal institution remaining the outsider. This experience laid the foundation for my approach to creative entrepreneurial endeavours, rooted in the culture, sound, and political voice of Hip Hop that resonated deeply with my experiences.

Rehearsing with my fellow dancers weekly, I found that while some became integral to my life, others remained distant figures. The recurring narrative of feeling like an outsider persisted, echoing my previous experiences with dance groups. However, this time, I had embraced my unique dance style as an integral part of my self-expression. Immersed in a college environment where diversity in dance styles prevailed, I stood out as the sole Black

girl, towering over my peers in stature. Despite anticipating another bout of feeling like an outsider, I resolved to remain steadfast in being true to myself.

Studying dance and performing arts at college provided an unconscious foundation that would shape not only my approach to dance but also my trajectory towards creative entrepreneurial endeavours. Rooted in the ethos of Hip Hop culture, which had long been intertwined with my upbringing and community experiences, this period of self-discovery continued to align itself with the spiritual awakening within me which Gerald Myers aptly notes, that labelling something as "spiritual" transcends fixed connotations, encapsulating a nebulous essence that is essential to our being (Myers, Gerald E, 1998).

Drawing from the rich traditions of Black communities and families deeply rooted in the church, I began to discern a profound connection between spirituality and my engagement with Hip Hop culture. Hip Hop's sounds, movements, and representations became a platform for me to authentically communicate stories and navigate the complexities of my Black girlhood. (Brown, 2013) emphasises the importance of creative spaces for Black girls to express and define themselves, linking spirituality, art, and identity as transformative tools (Brown, 2013). Hip Hop, like SOLHOT, transcends political and social spheres, offering a means for self-expression and collective empowerment.

Despite my personal evolution, the voices and experiences of Black girls remained marginalised and overlooked within both mainstream and cultural spaces. Black girls are often subject to adultification, where they are perceived as less innocent and more mature than their white peers, leading to a lack of empathy and support (Epstein et al., 2017). This marginalisation is compounded by systemic racism, intersectional oppression, colourism, and the hyper-sexualisation of Black female bodies, which limits opportunities for self-expression and recognition (Morris, 2016; Brown, 2013). Driven by a desire to channel my energy into meaningful connections with other Black girls and creatives, I embarked on a journey to create spaces where our spirits could thrive, performing nationally and finding empowerment in sharing my artistic voice.

Having not been accepted to my preferred dance schools, I was offered a place on a dance degree program in Liverpool, where I could immerse myself in the choreographic legacy of Katherine Dunham and Martha Graham. Dunham's ethnographic research, coupled with her prowess as a dancer, choreographer, and educator, resonated deeply with me, inspiring the wide variety the artistic journey could offer me.

During this phase, my aesthetic style and physical movement evolved into manifestations of my innermost expressions at that time, extending beyond the confines of the stage. While my confidence as a creative broadened I remained unmistakably an outsider. In this

university environment I was the only Black individual in my year group, and one of two across the entire course, contributing to my sense of isolation.

In the initial weeks, I encountered glaring microaggressions and racism when my peers presumed I couldn't speak English a moment I chose to address later in this autoethnography, despite the hostile environment I chose to focus on my dance aspirations. However, instances of racism persisted. I distinctly recall receiving a top grade on an assignment, only for my classmates to attribute it to the race of the sole Black teacher who had assessed it, undermining my achievement. Similar sentiments arose when I choreographed a piece centred on Black carnival culture, and another around  Missy Elliot were met with resistance from peers who failed to grasp its significance and complained about my choice to use Black dancers from outside of the university. As I progressed through the course and engaged in professional dance tours, complaints from peers arose about my absence from practice sessions, yet I still excelled in practical exams, further fuelling accusations of favouritism and my experience of racism.

The pervasive racism I endured throughout my degree compelled me to turn to critical race theory (CRT), which elucidates how racism is deeply entrenched in social structures, rendering it normalized and imperceptible (Hylton, 2012). CRT underscores the pervasive influence of racism in academic institutions, a phenomenon echoed in my experiences as a Black student. The underrepresentation of Black students in prestigious universities and the pervasive racism experienced by Black students in UK higher education settings underscored the systemic nature of discrimination (Boliver, 2016; National Union of Students, 2011).

Amidst this backdrop of racial adversity, I encountered additional instances of racism, including having eggs thrown at a friend and me as we walked home, to enduring colourist remarks in nightclubs noting I was “pretty for a Black girl”. Despite these affronts, I remained undeterred, forging meaningful connections with fellow creatives outside the confines of university walls and for the very first time experiencing the body-spirit connectivity Preston C speaks of. I began collaborating with dancers, DJs, and other creatives, I began to carve out a niche for myself, laying the foundation for my artistic vision to flourish.

This section continues to illustrate the systemic challenges of racism, exclusion, and marginalisation faced by Black girls, this time within predominantly white institutions, which serve as catalysts for the development of creative entrepreneurial practices. I highlight how engagement with Hip Hop culture, combined with academic and professional experiences, shape my personal identity formation and entrepreneurial journey. While exploring how

structural racism present in these environments is navigated aligning with the aim to examine strategies employed by Black women to navigate positionality and empowerment.

Dancing Through Motherhood: Embodying Resilience and Transformation

Finding my stride in Liverpool, amidst social and spatial tensions, marked a formative period of personal and professional growth. My academic achievements and dance career, rooted in both theatre and community engagement, offered not only fulfilment but also a sense of embodied agency and upward mobility. Yet, this sense of momentum was abruptly interrupted in August 2005 by the unexpected news of my pregnancy.

This revelation, arriving on the heels of a traumatic miscarriage, plunged me into a complex terrain of hope, grief, and anxiety. While mainstream narratives often romanticise impending motherhood, for Black women the experience is fraught with historical and structural risks (Collins, 2000; Davis, 2011). My own joy was tempered by memories of loss and the isolating prospect of single motherhood, an identity hyper visible in public scrutiny, yet frequently erased in its complexity within dominant narratives, as theorised in TDBFE.

The dissolution of my relationship with the child's father, coupled with the withdrawal of those I considered family, amplified my vulnerability. The expectations of others, rooted in intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class, threatened to reduce my story to a familiar deficit model, as critiqued by scholars like Cooper (2017) and Bass (2020). The possibility of creative self-actualisation, through dance and education, seemed under threat.

A traumatic car accident during pregnancy further exposed the precarity of Black maternal embodiment. In the silent terror of the ambulance, I confronted the possibility of losing my unborn child. The return of a heartbeat, a momentary resurrection, brought relief, yet even that was shadowed by the knowledge that my journey would remain subject to public surveillance, suspicion, and judgment. As Black women's bodies and choices are constantly read through histories of pathologisation, regulation, and collective struggle (Collins, 2000; Flynn, 2016).

The birth of my daughter on March 11, 2006, was more than a private turning point; it became an act of radical self-definition and aspiration. Despite lingering shame and external disapproval, her arrival fuelled an urgent resolve to carve out a narrative of resilience, agency, and creative entrepreneurship. Here, motherhood was not a limitation, but a sense of possibility, a lived praxis where care, creativity, and survival are always collective.

In embracing motherhood, I became part of a transnational lineage of Black women who transform social constraints into new forms of artistry, leadership, and resistance. My creative labour, whether in dance, entrepreneurship, or community-building, was never solely for myself, but a contribution to a broader tapestry of Black maternal ingenuity and communal survival (Gilroy, 1993; McKittrick, 2006).

Amid the challenges, I drew on the support and encouragement of friends and family, whose faith in my potential exemplified the “othermothering” and community scaffolding central to Black feminist praxis. Their belief was both an anchor and a launching point, enabling me to navigate adversity and seize emerging opportunities.

In this way, my journey is not simply a story of overcoming, but a testament to the collective, creative, and resistant capacities that Black women mobilise globally.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a critical exploration of the systemic and SPEC challenges Black girls, women, and mothers face, demonstrating how these adversities act as catalysts for engagement in creative entrepreneurship. By reflecting on personal experiences within dance spaces and the broader Hip Hop culture, the chapter responds to the research questions by highlighting the exclusionary forces of racism, colourism, sizeism, and the male gaze, which often render Black girls and women marginalised. These systemic barriers not only limit their access to mainstream artistic and entrepreneurial spaces but also drive them toward alternative, self-defined pathways of empowerment, where creative entrepreneurship becomes both a survival strategy and a method of asserting agency.

Through the lens of Hip Hop culture, it becomes clear that cultural expression is a powerful tool for reshaping identity and reclaiming autonomy. Dance, as explored in this narrative, becomes more than just a medium of artistic expression; it is a form of resistance and a way to carve out space in an environment that seeks to marginalise Black bodies. This chapter also underscores how Hip Hop culture fosters entrepreneurial agency by allowing Black women to challenge limiting stereotypes and assert control over their narratives and futures.

In responding to the aims of this research, the chapter reveals how creative entrepreneurship for Black women is deeply intertwined with navigating and resisting systemic oppression. It critically analyses the strategies Black women employ to achieve empowerment, demonstrating that their engagement in creative entrepreneurship is not only a response to SPEC barriers but also a deliberate act of self-determination within transatlantic spaces. Hip Hop’s influence is evident in the way it shapes identity,

entrepreneurial practices, and socio-political engagement, offering Black women the tools to reimagine their roles as leaders and creators in a world that often seeks to silence them.

Mother-Hood

Key Words: Motherhood, Single Motherhood, Spatiality, Social, Political, Economic and Cultural Landscape

Period: 2003-2009

Mother-Hood realities.

*My Spidey-Senses is tinglin'
Feel something, got my radars up

Somethin' going on, I feel funny
Can't tell me nothin' different (different), my nose twitchin' (twitchin')
Intuition setting in like Steve vision (uh)
I still close my eyes, I still see visions
Still hear that voice in the back of my mind (mind)
So what I do? I still take heed, I still listen (listen)
I still paint that perfect picture
I still shine bright like a prism, my words still skippin

I read between the lines of the eyes and your brows
Your handshake ain't matching your smile, aha, you niggas foul (I can feel it in the air)

I can feel it in the air
I can feel it in the air
I can hear it in your voice
I can feel it in the air*

Benie Seigle (2005) 

Motherhood Unchained: Navigating Freedom, Shame, and Reclaiming Power

This chapter utilises DEP to interrogate the layered experiences of shame, surveillance, and collective resistance in early Black motherhood. Situated within the SPEC dimensions of race, gender, and spatial inequality, my narrative traces how Black maternal bodies become sites of both social scrutiny and communal power, across generations and geographies.

Historically, Black motherhood has always been entangled with surveillance and regulation, from the plantation to welfare. Davis (2011) and Flynn (2016) reveal how colonial and post-colonial powers systematically policed Black women's fertility and mothering, weaponising policy and social narratives to pathologise Black families. This legacy endures: the Moynihan Report (1965) in the US and contemporary welfare regimes in the UK (Reynolds, 2021) have institutionalised deficit models, casting Black single mothers as agents of decline while erasing the violence of poverty, racism, and state neglect (Iversen & Farber, 1996).

These narratives are not contained by borders. Transnationally, Black women's maternal practices have been surveilled, disciplined, and pathologized, yet, in response, Black mothers have mobilised family networks, community alliances, and creative labour to resist erasure (Collins, 2000; Craddock, 2015; Gilroy, 1993). Our stories are marked by forced migration, economic exclusion, and systemic violence, but equally by resilience, improvisation, and the radical reimagining of family and future.

My own experience is shaped by this continuum. The shame and fear I felt as a young, dark-skinned, plus-size Black mother were not simply personal burdens, they were produced by the enduring structures of colonialism and global anti-Blackness. The pressure to conform or disappear was immense, yet I drew strength from a transatlantic lineage of women who refused to be defined by social policy or statistical erasure.

Collective resistance has always been our inheritance. Across the UK, US, and Caribbean, Black mothers practice what Collins (2000) describes as "othermothering", building webs of support, mutual aid, and knowledge exchange. Conversations with other BFCEMs reveal how visibility, strategy, and solidarity are cultivated not just for individual survival but for the survival and flourishing of whole communities.

Through DEP, I read my embodied experience as data within this broader historical and transnational frame. This chapter moves beyond binary representations of Black motherhood, centring the creative and collective strategies that transform trauma into agency, and surveillance into an occasion for solidarity, self-definition, and entrepreneurial vision.

"You are going far in this world, baby, because you dare to risk everything... and if you don't succeed, all you have to do is try again."

Angelou, M. (2013), p 78

Hustle and Hope: Navigating Black Motherhood and Spatial Survival

*“Same old shit (shit), just a different day
Out here tryna get it (get it), each and every way
Momma need a house (house), baby need some shoes
Times are getting hard, guess what I'ma do,
Hustle, hustle, hustle hard, Closed mouths don't get fed on this boulevard”*

“Hustle Hard” - Ace Hood (2011) 

Black motherhood is not only a private responsibility but a collective, creative, and political praxis, a daily negotiation of survival and possibility within landscapes shaped by anti-Blackness and scarcity. To mother as a single Black woman is to resist erasure, to convert the weight of structural neglect into acts of care, creativity, and self-determination (Collins, 2000; McKittrick, 2006). This labour is not solitary: it is embedded within a wider tradition of Black women forging networks of support, solidarity, and creative enterprise that challenge deficit narratives and make space for new futures (Gilmore, 2002).

My own journey is a testament to this collective struggle. Drawing from the courage of my grandparents and father, I refused to allow our story to be scripted by constraint. Instead, I joined the long lineage of those who transform adversity into new architectures of survival and joy, seeing the raising of a child as a radical act and creative entrepreneurship as community-building, not mere self-advancement (hooks, 1981; Turner, 2020).

Mothering in hostile environments demands not only practical vigilance but an attuned emotional geography, what Lorde (1984) calls using anger as data, a somatic map of harm and resistance. Each threat, each panic attack, becomes not just a personal trial but evidence of what Geronimus (1992) theorises as “weathering”, the cumulative, embodied toll of racism. DEP frames these experiences as embodied archives; my nervous system, like those of other Black mothers, carries generational memory, mapping the impact of systemic violence and creative resistance.

Our homes are contested spaces: both sanctuaries and battlegrounds, sites of joy and latent harm. As McKittrick (2006) and Durce (2012) assert, Black women’s spatial realities, whether in the UK, Caribbean, or US, are shaped by both hostility and collective resilience. “Mother-Hood,” as I define it, signifies the collective labour of nurturing in spaces marked by structural violence, but also by cultural wealth and kinship.

The lack of infrastructure for BFCM is not a personal failing but a systemic gap. Our creative and entrepreneurial work is, by necessity, communal: every act of building, teaching, and healing is grounded in the histories, struggles, and aspirations of those who came before and those who stand alongside us (Fouquier, 2011; Harris, 2005). DEP and TDBFE insist that Black women's lived knowledge is not anecdotal but foundational, demanding institutional recognition and protection.

Despite trauma and doubt, I moved forward, rooted in legacy, nourished by cultural memory, and committed to freedom over familiarity. Like the Windrush generation and my foremothers before me, I chose to imagine beyond constraint, knowing that Black women's collective creative labour is a blueprint for liberation.

Prequal - Towards Entrepreneurial Praxis and Motherhood

The entrepreneurial influence before motherhood.

Upon my return from Liverpool at the conclusion of the academic year, I joined my father's law firm, where I continued my work as an Ilex Paralegal. This experience not only provided practical legal training but also served as my introduction to concepts of generational wealth, legacy, and entrepreneurship.

In the confines of my father's law firm, I witnessed firsthand the embodiment of entrepreneurial success. His commanding presence and strategic positioning within the community served as a testament to his achievements. The office space, meticulously adorned with African artefacts and a subtle nod to hip-hop culture, reflected both professional sophistication and cultural identity.

As young professionals under my father's mentorship, we were held to exacting standards. Attending meetings armed with pen and notepad, dressed in smart attire, we were taught the importance of preparedness and diligence. Reflecting on these practices, I recognise them as foundational elements of professionalism and organisational culture.

Working alongside my father and fellow colleagues, I absorbed invaluable lessons in leadership and discernment. Witnessing instances of exploitation and opportunism, I resolved to cultivate a no-nonsense approach to leadership, prioritising integrity, and boundary-setting.

As I embarked on the journey of motherhood, the support of my godbrother proved indispensable. His unwavering assistance amidst the demands of pregnancy underscored the importance of reliable allies in navigating personal and professional challenges.

In hindsight, my tenure at my father's firm not only imparted practical skills but also instilled within me a sense of ambition and determination. Witnessing my father's accomplishments served as a powerful catalyst for my own aspirations, transcending mere career objectives to encompass a vision of personal fulfilment and legacy-building.

My experiences within my father's law firm served as a formative chapter in my journey towards entrepreneurial praxis and motherhood. Rooted in principles of professionalism and driven by a desire for personal excellence, I carry forward the lessons learned as I navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship and familial responsibilities.

Zeal for Change: A Journey from Legal Mentorship to Grassroots Entrepreneurship

My entrepreneurial journey began with the founding of Zeal Contemporary, where I served as Director and Lead Facilitator. Originally conceived as a summer dance programme, Zeal evolved into a dynamic grassroots organisation, a creative sanctuary, especially for Black girls. Its growth exposed an urgent truth: Black girls require sustained, affirming spaces for creative expression and leadership development. Drawing on my own lived experience and professional practice, I envisioned Zeal not as a fleeting project but as an enduring ecosystem for cultivating Black girlhood on its own terms.

The demand for continuity was immediate and undeniable. What began as a one-off summer initiative quickly transformed into bi-weekly sessions, establishing Zeal as a consistent space for self-discovery, artistic exploration, and emotional growth. Here, dance and performance became more than skills training; they functioned as tools for building confidence, sisterhood, and self-definition. These interventions served as both artistic praxis and empirical data within the DEP framework, with visual and performative expression operating as embodied testimony and counter-narrative.

A young dancer once told me, "Zeal wasn't just a dance class. It was where I became visible. Where I stopped feeling invisible." Her words crystallise the significance of culturally specific creative spaces that honour Black girlhood, spaces where presence is affirmed, and assimilation is not a precondition.

"During my time at Zeal, I experienced nothing but sisterhood and support with a strong passion for dance. Being a young teenager at the time, I looked at Zeal as my escape, especially with a teacher like Nathania. She wasn't just a teacher, she was a tutor, a friend who wanted her young ladies to excel in all that they did".

Black Girl, Zeal Dancer (2007)



Image: 1-3 Zeal Contemporary

*“My beloved lets get down to business
Mental self defensive fitness
Don't rush the show
You gotta go for what you know
Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be
Lemme hear you say, Fight the power!”*

Public Enemy (1990) 

Zeal also became a test site for my own praxis, where vision was tested against the realities of grassroots leadership. Lessons learned from my father’s legal practice, professionalism, boundaries, integrity, informed my approach to organisational governance and fundraising. Securing resources became both a survival strategy and a form of resistance, ensuring Zeal’s expansion without compromising its core mission.

This mission deepened when my cousin transformed an abandoned, violence-afflicted community centre into a music studio. Together, we envisioned a sanctuary, a centre of excellence. Young people, particularly Black boys drawn to sound and storytelling, gravitated toward it. Our independence, however, drew scrutiny. Operating without institutional affiliation, we were labelled “hard-to-reach,” a term that revealed more about the system than about us. Suddenly, we were offered a five-figure grant, contingent upon partnering with MAPPA, a law enforcement initiative designed for “risk management.” The subtext was clear: they wanted access, they wanted surveillance disguised as support. My response was unequivocal: *“I will not sell my soul to the devil.”*

The consequences were swift and severe: police raids, helicopter flyovers, tampering with the centre, and ultimately, the forced replacement of our culturally competent Black male manager with an unconnected white woman. The centre, once a haven, was weaponised

against us, making the state's message unmistakable: Black self-determination will be punished.

This moment crystallised the realities of leading as a Black woman in creative entrepreneurship. It exposed the deep, enduring structures of anti-Black racism, state surveillance, and institutional betrayal. As Bell (1991), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), and Omi and Winant (2014) argue, racism is not an isolated event but a durable structure, infiltrating employment, housing, education, and health. My experience was a living testament to this: visibility, especially for Black communities, girls, and gender-expansive youth, comes at a cost.

My work at Zeal illuminated the intersectional dynamics of race, gender, and geography. It demanded a new kind of leadership, rooted in trust, safety, and collective solidarity. In a context where community infrastructure was persistently under siege, fostering sisterhood became both shield and sword.

This phase of my journey revealed that grassroots work, while vital, is not enough without structural transformation. But it also confirmed that art, when entrusted to young Black girls, is more than expression. It is a revolution.

Costumes, Creativity, and Community: A Mother's Journey to Entrepreneurial Freedom

Expression through fashion and styling has always been central to my creativity and personal identity, shaped by the meticulous flair of my father and the visual language of Hip Hop culture. With nearly a decade of experience in both high-street and luxury fashion, stepping into costume design for a feature film shot in my community felt like a natural progression. I embraced the opportunity wholeheartedly.

The project offered a substantial budget, allowing me to collaborate closely with the director to craft characters through clothing, hair, beauty, and accessories. What made it particularly powerful was the cast and crew, composed largely of my own community. My cousins took on roles as hairstylists and runners; Zeal Contemporary dancers performed alongside my sister and known artists like Lady Leashur. We were young, Black, and building something, together.

Balancing this opportunity with motherhood, however, demanded a robust support system. It echoed the traditions of Black familial networks and fictive kinship (Collins, 1987), where caregiving is shared. My relatives ensured nursery runs, meals, and emotional backing as I embraced this creative role.

Still, maternal guilt lingered. Like many mothers, I battled the internalised belief that to fully pursue my purpose was to somehow abandon my child. The tension between ambition and devotion is well documented (Elvin-Nowak, 1999; Guendouzi, 2006), and for me, it was almost paralysing. Penny Woolcock, the film's director, encouraged me to consider producing and even stepping in front of the camera. But lacking access, mentorship, or a clear path into the industry, I let the moment pass..



Image:4-6 The one day set:

Instead, I returned to retail and freelanced where I could. For years, I juggled roles, sales assistant, supervisor, merchandiser, patched together with agency gigs and community-based creative work. Though these roles offered stability, they never aligned with the lifestyle or legacy I envisioned for my daughter and me. The final turning point came in a luxury store, where, despite being a top sales assistant, I was asked to clean the stockroom. It was clear: my potential was being squandered.

With quiet resolve, I left. No dramatic exit. Just a deep knowing that I was done shrinking. I boarded a bus to my cousin's house and chose myself.

Though I had already launched projects like Zeal Contemporary, which I had to self-fund after resisting funders' attempts to dilute its mission, I recognised that retail and fragmented freelancing could no longer sustain my creative or maternal ambitions. What I needed was alignment: flexibility, purpose, positioning, and wealth that honoured who I was becoming.

My journey echoes Boyd's (2000) resource-constrained model of entrepreneurship: many Black women, particularly single mothers, turn to creative entrepreneurship not as an option, but as a means of survival and legacy-building.

These themes were explored in the photo essay *Frames of Power*, a visual documentation of the intimate, everyday beauty of raising my daughter amidst systemic hostility. Reflecting our shared resilience, our bond, and my refusal to let oppressive structures shape her sense of self. Through images of laughter, learning, and care, I captured the power of a mothering model rooted in creativity, love, and refusal.

I rejected conventional paradigms of motherhood and career. Instead, I created an improvised blend of communal parenting, experimental work, big vision, and countless mistakes. This fusion, though messy, was powerful. It turned motherhood into a source of resilience, artistry, and self-discovery, an evolving praxis of becoming.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Power through Praxis and Possibility

Continuing to draw upon Black feminist theory and intersectionality, this critical autoethnographic chapter offers an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of BFCEMs becoming as well as Black girlhood. It interrogates the entangled relationship between Black girlhood, motherhood, creative entrepreneurship, spatiality, and systemic injustice. Through the intersectional axes of race, gender, space, and class, the narrative exposes the multifaceted barriers that Black single mothers navigate, not only in nurturing life but in carving paths to survival, creativity, and power.

This chapter has illuminated how structural inequalities and historical legacies, from enslavement to post-colonial disenfranchisement, continue to shape the psychic and material realities of Black motherhood. It reveals how guilt, shame, and fear of failure are not merely personal emotions but social artefacts, embedded within centuries of anti-Blackness, misogynoir, and economic exclusion. Yet within these constraints, Black girls, mothers, creatives persist, embodying faith, ambition, and transformative hope.

The politicisation of Black motherhood, particularly through the lens of Black feminist spatial imagination, affirms Black women as critical agents within broader socio-political landscapes. Far from passive recipients of state policy or cultural scrutiny, these emerging BFCEMs enact resistance through everyday choices, choosing to parent, to dream, to build, and to lead. These insights respond directly to the first overarching research question: *What are the pressing issues Black women face during Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood that become catalysts for entrepreneurship?*

In exploring these issues, this chapter surfaces a composite narrative drawn from both personal experience and the voices of other Black girls and emerging BFCEMs. One mother spoke of becoming a parent unexpectedly but described how that shift awakened her

leadership: *“Motherhood made me watch myself closer, because I knew someone else was watching. It made me intentional.”* Another reflected on the absence of support and the audacity of trying anyway: *“People didn’t think I could do it, but I couldn’t afford to agree with them.”* These are not isolated stories. They reflect a collective truth: Black mothers are not waiting for permission to lead, they are already doing so, often invisibly and at great cost.

In response to the second research question, *How Black female creative entrepreneurial single mothers navigate positionality, upward mobility, and power?* This chapter asserts that the yearning for spatial liberation is foundational. From grassroots organising to fashioning alternative economies, BFCEMs engage in spatial, emotional, and economic reimagining’s that exceed traditional entrepreneurial models. Their work is not merely about capital; it is about reclaiming place, purpose, and presence.

To that end, this chapter introduces DEP as an emergent Black feminist methodology. DEP fuses lived experience, critical autoethnography, and cultural praxis, spanning the transatlantic sites of the UK, Jamaica, and the US. It centres the body as a site of knowledge, trauma, and resistance; honours cultural production as legitimate epistemology; and frames Black women’s leadership through the intimate, spiritual, and systemic dimensions of their lives. DEP allows us to read gesture, silence, space, and style as data, legitimate and revelatory. Through DEP, creative outputs like dance, documentary, fashion, and photo-essays become both testimony and strategy, holding the emotional and intellectual complexity of diasporic Black womanhood.

This framework confirms that without networks of practical care, spiritual anchoring, and visionary risk-taking, often akin to micro-acts of philanthropy, the possibilities for transformation remain out of reach. Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, when even minimal support is present, Black single mothers generate profound change, not only for themselves but for their children, communities, and cultures.

Ultimately, motherhood is not a static identity but a dynamic site of agency, evolution, and embodied wisdom. This chapter reframes Black single motherhood not as a social problem to be solved, but as a lens through which to understand the creativity, endurance, and sovereignty of Black women. It calls on academic, policy, and cultural institutions to bear witness, to truly listen, resource, and recognise the legacy-making work that Black single mothers continue to do every day.

Themes: Identity, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment Vision, Faith, and Purpose

Period: 2009- 2014

“Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us.”
- Wilma Rudolph, U.S. track and field athlete

Entrepreneurship, as Audretsch (2020) and Dees (2017) argue, is a transformative force that not only contests dominant socio-economic structures but actively reconfigures SPEC landscapes. In this chapter, I continue tracing my journey of vision, faith, and purpose toward creative entrepreneurship, situating this narrative within the frameworks of DEP and TDBFE. These frameworks centre the lived, embodied, and diasporic experiences of Black women, emphasising creative entrepreneurship as both a site of resistance and a strategy for systemic transformation.

Anchored in Womanist ideology, I argue that the individual actions of a young Black mother can catalyse broader social change, contributing to the reimagining of contemporary Womanist spaces. Historically rooted in Black women’s homes, churches, and community centres, these spaces function as sites for personal growth, collective empowerment, and socio-political resistance (Turman, 2019). Through my entrepreneurial journey, I aimed to centre Black women’s voices, leveraging storytelling, social media, and digital technologies as platforms for empowerment and visibility. This aligns with scholarship highlighting how Black women have historically used creative expression and entrepreneurship as powerful forms of resistance against systemic oppression (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2012; Houchen, 2015).

In combining Womanist theory with entrepreneurial praxis, I sought not only to amplify Black women’s contributions to contemporary society but to ensure these contributions were transformative, visible, and enduring (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Littlefield & Robinson, 2005). DEP informs this approach by asserting that embodied creativity, rooted in both personal experience and collective memory, is a critical praxis for resisting dehumanisation. Similarly, TDBFE underscores the importance of recognising the interconnectedness of Black

women's experiences across the UK, USA, and wider diaspora, challenging nationalistic frameworks that often render these experiences invisible.

The insights gained from my lived experience formed the core resource I carried into this pursuit. My background included transferable and specialist skills in dance, retail, and nascent engagement with the film industry, where I had developed networks with hip-hop artists and aspiring creative professionals, individuals equally driven to change their lives and environments. I recognised the existence of a creative and cultural void I could help to fill, one that reflected the dreams and visions burning so fiercely within my spirit that at times it felt as if I would combust.

As a young Black single mother, I was acutely aware of the scepticism surrounding my ambitions, often dismissed as unrealistic dreams. Yet I understood that my journey was part of a much broader and historical continuum, the cultural, maternal, global, historical, social, and political realities long navigated by Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 2006; Houchen, 2015; Whitaker, 2013). TDBFE frames this connectedness across temporal and spatial boundaries, positioning my entrepreneurial vision not as an isolated aspiration but as a diasporic act of resistance.

The absence of tangible examples of Black creative entrepreneurship within my immediate environment in Birmingham, England, further intensified my determination. Unlike the vibrant cultural influences, I encountered in New York City, where Hip Hop culture permeated daily life, Birmingham offered few models for what I envisioned. Faced with dismissal and marginalisation, I took deliberate steps to articulate my vision, outlining actionable goals that transcended my prior work in youth and community engagement, film, and retail. This was not merely about economic advancement; it was a strategic effort to carve out a new positionality within the creative industry, with aspirations for international expansion, particularly toward the U.S., where my creative imagination had first been ignited.

Central to my perseverance was a deep conviction that the vision I pursued was divinely planted within me. This spiritual grounding, coupled with the unwavering support of my father, served as a beacon against the tides of doubt. His belief in my potential affirmed the transformative power of faith, determination, and intergenerational support in navigating the precarious pathways of entrepreneurship as a young Black single mother. Within the DEP framework, such familial support is not peripheral; it is an embodied, diasporic resource that sustains movement through hostile SPEC terrains.

As I built this new entrepreneurial endeavour, discerning and substantiating my purpose became paramount. It necessitated crafting an enterprise that not only mirrored my personal growth but also allowed for organic evolution within the creative and entertainment

industries. My journey toward purposefulness intertwined survival strategies with new negotiations of womanhood, motherhood, and Black femininity, narratives central to DEP's emphasis on the embodied experiences of Black women as sites of knowledge production.

My driving force remained simple yet profound: to forge a better life for myself and my daughter, while creating pathways for fellow creatives, women, and mothers who shared similar visions. I began my work literally from the floor of my living room, before even owning a dining table, immersed in brainstorming sessions, identifying market entrance points, establishing key performance indicators (KPIs), and building vision boards. This labour, informed by my affinity for African American and Hip Hop cultural aesthetics, was strategically aligned with the emerging creative industries infrastructure in the UK, particularly within London.

Months of meticulous planning and introspection culminated in the manifestation of a comprehensive business plan for X3I, an entertainment and artist development company infused with a robust Hip Hop ethos. Yet transforming vision into business ownership required more than strategic planning; it necessitated financial resources, belief, and resilience. In a matrix of doubt, aspiration, fear, and fearlessness, my father stood unwavering, offering £500 as my initial seed funding, symbolising more than financial investment: it was a radical act of belief in intergenerational entrepreneurship.

Drawing upon the insights of scholars such as Robert Con Davis and David S. Gross, who articulate the maverick sensibilities inherent in asserting agency from marginalised positions, my entrepreneurial journey took on a dual nature. It was simultaneously a vehicle for individual empowerment and a communal enterprise deeply rooted in Hip Hop culture. Harrison and Arthur (2019) emphasise that Hip Hop's mobility across geographic and sociological boundaries provides a unique framework for both entrepreneurial innovation and social liberation. X3I was, from inception, an experiment in the intersectionality of entrepreneurship, cultural production, and communal empowerment, embodying the diasporic and emancipatory possibilities outlined in DEP and TDBFE.



Image 7 X3I Logo by Nathania Atkinson and Myke Forte

Each X stood for an element of the brand X=Power, X=Indulgence X=Independence

Embarking on entrepreneurship within the fiercely competitive entertainment industry as a young Black single mother from the ghetto demanded more than resilience; it required an unbreakable belief in the viability of my vision. Each day presented new obstacles compounded by relentless financial instability, yet rather than deter me, these challenges sharpened my resolve. I pursued not only financial stability but a deeper mission: to honour the legacy of possibility, resilience, and recognition my grandparents and parents had carved before me. This journey became intimately tied to my self-worth, a personal revolution from overlooked to unstoppable, setting a transformative example for my daughter and for others seeking to redefine their narratives in a world that often doubted them.

Yet beneath entrepreneurial ambition lies an isolating, often invisible burden. For Black single mothers, the dual pressures of business creation and motherhood create compounded stresses, with entrepreneurship functioning both as an economic necessity and a potential site of self-empowerment amidst systemic inequities (Brush et al., 2019; McLean, 2018). The solitude of balancing these roles is intense: Black single mothers face persistent societal bias, economic vulnerability, and systemic isolation (Collins, 2000; Eddo-Lodge, 2017). Entrepreneurial spaces, as Jones and Clifton (2017) argue, rarely account for the structural needs of mothers, leaving them to bear business pressures alongside the emotional labour of parenting.

The psychological weight of this journey, unforeseen responsibilities, constant fear of failure, deepens self-doubt when social structures offer no meaningful support (Green, 2021). It was a reality that fuelled both my anxiety and my relentless pursuit of excellence, often at the cost of my physical wellness. Yet in this context, BFCEMs embody profound resilience: our pursuits are not merely economic but acts of generational defiance, committed to breaking cycles of disenfranchisement and building legacies beyond personal gain (Hill Collins, 2019). Entrepreneurship for us is not simply survival, it is a reclamation of agency in spaces historically closed to us.

Armed with determination, familial support, and a modest financial investment, I committed to transforming my entrepreneurial vision into reality. As I began assembling a team, I sought women who reflected the spirit of the journey: talented, ambitious, risk-takers, each fuelled by a hunger to transform their dreams into viable futures.

X3I, my emerging entertainment and artist development company, embodied this ethos. Designed to offer full-service creative direction, styling, beauty, video vixen services, and artist development, X3I became a vibrant mosaic of diverse empowerment. Our collective spanned Black Caribbean, Filipino, White British, Biracial, and Black African identities, a testament to the possibilities inherent in inclusive cultural production. Authenticity guided our selection process, recognising, as Halliday (2022) asserts, that championing Black women as cultural producers enhances the visibility and connectivity of urban, diasporic creativity.

This diverse collective reaped the rewards of expanded opportunities, richer collaborations, and a globally conscious outlook on womanhood and creative representation. Our campaigns, often set to the backdrop of artists like Rihanna and Jeezy, JayZ  were not merely aesthetic exercises but assertions of agency in an industry historically indifferent to Black women's narratives.

This ethos of diversity and inclusion at X3I aligned with research by Joseph, Ahasic, Clark, and Templeton (2021), who underscore that organisational decision-making is significantly strengthened through the integration of diverse perspectives across gender, race, and ethnicity. I extended this further, intentionally including motherhood, age, and geographic origin, reaching out to women I had met over the years and others referred through informal networks, those ready to change their circumstances through creative empowerment.

Once the X3I team was established, I turned to the creative direction of our digital campaign and website, a process that quickly revealed the gendered challenges embedded in collaborative work. My male collaborator, threatened by my leadership, frequently withheld content and leveraged emotional manipulation, embodying the misogynoir Moya Bailey (2008) articulates: the specific, layered oppression faced by Black women. His attempts to control my creative output were a stark reminder that Black women cannot depend on men who perceive our aspirations as threats. After fraught negotiations, I secured my materials and severed professional ties. Years later, we would rebuild a personal friendship, with firm boundaries, but the lesson remained: autonomy must be defended, even when collaboration seems necessary.

In reflection, X3I's development was subconsciously rooted in Black feminist thought, particularly the ethos championed by bell hooks (1984): the pursuit of Black women's autonomy, resilience, and collective advancement against systemic marginalisation. These values found tangible expression in our organisational practices, themselves echoing Pan-Africanist and Rastafarian principles of unity, self-determination, and liberation.

Team structures and project decisions at X3I prioritised the voices and creative input of the women involved. Rejecting the exploitative norms of the entertainment industry, we fostered respectful environments where contributions were valued, and talents nurtured. Contracts guaranteed fair pay and set clear boundaries for set conduct, building a culture that emphasised safety, dignity, and collaborative creativity. We also hosted skill-building workshops, ensuring women could not only thrive within X3I but also carry their expertise into wider industries, fully embodying hooks' vision of resilience and perseverance. X3I was not just a service provider, it was a community of empowerment.

This positioning became even more critical as the creative industries, during this period and beyond, surged as one of the fastest-growing global sectors. The global demand for cultural products, fashion, design, music, and publishing, particularly in the UK, outpaced both income and population growth (GLA Economics, 2008). Creative industries' contribution to GDP rose to 3.1% by 2020, underscoring their expanding economic significance (UNCTAD, 2022; UNCTAD, 2024). For me, entering this field as a BFCEM was both a survival strategy and a vision for legacy-building.

Embedding X3I within the dynamic context of Hip Hop culture should have allowed me to leverage its immense marketing power and cultural capital (British Council, 2003; Edmondson, 2008). However, as a Black female entrepreneur introducing a disruptive model, I quickly encountered challenges deeply rooted in gender politics and entrenched power dynamics. While Hip Hop offered a platform for global reach, the industry's internal structures remained resistant to true inclusivity.

X3I's mission, to champion female empowerment and diversity, predated the mainstream embrace of these ideals. In hindsight, I was spearheading a movement whose magnitude I could not yet fully comprehend. By insisting on accessibility, authentic representation, and creative ownership, I was forced to confront not only my womanhood and Blackness but also the industry's longstanding hierarchies of power. In doing so, X3I inadvertently challenged entrenched paradigms that historically confined women to roles of models, dancers, or vixens, while reimagining control over our own narratives and bodies (Jhally, 2006).

Through this process, I learned that entrepreneurship for Black women in the creative industries is never simply about commerce; it is about survival, resistance, and redefinition. Every decision made within X3I became an act of reclaiming space and reshaping what representation could look like within industries that too often capitalised on Black culture without valuing Black women themselves.

“Feelin' myself, I'm feelin' myself, I'm feelin' my

I'm with some hood girls lookin' back at it

And a good girl in my tax bracket (Uh)

Got a black card that'll let Saks have it

These Chanel bags is a bad habit.”

Nicki Minaj, Beyonce- Feeling Myself (2014) 

As the X3I team began securing bookings, paid gigs, and acclaim, we embarked on a journey of financial empowerment, carving a rare space for compensated female creative labour within the UK's music video and editorial scenes. In an era predating the ubiquity of social media, the X3I women attracted considerable attention. They stood out as some of the few female figures receiving both financial recognition and professional respect in an industry where, far too often, young women volunteered their time without adequate compensation or basic protections, an exploitation I witnessed repeatedly while supervising on set.

This journey towards financial autonomy reflects the praxis outlined in DEP, where creative labour by Black women operates simultaneously as a survival strategy, radical assertion and expression of agency within constrained SPEC landscapes.

Navigating the convergence of Hip Hop, Barbie, and "Bad Bitch" aesthetics, as Halliday (2022) explores, the X3I team embodied a confident, unapologetic femininity that strengthened the visibility of Black girls within the UK's creative industries. Yet behind this visibility, familiar hierarchies persisted. In coordinating bookings, I observed how colourism silently shaped casting decisions: darker-skinned women were consistently sidelined in favour of lighter-skinned counterparts, reinforcing longstanding racialised biases in beauty standards (Hunter, 2007; Russell-Cole, Wilson, & Hall, 2013).

The privileging of lighter skin tones in casting choices echoed transatlantic beauty hierarchies, demanding a TDBFE lens to fully understand how these dynamics operate across Black British, American, and diasporic media landscapes. Our in-house X3I model, dark-skinned, fuller-bodied, and radiating power, epitomised an aesthetic celebrated within Black media like Source, Vibe, and XXL magazines, yet her opportunities for lead roles were repeatedly curtailed (Keith, 2009).

These dynamics mirrored the broader systemic entrenchment of racialised beauty standards and sexual politics, where darker-skinned women were often relegated to hypersexualised, peripheral archetypes. As Collins (2000) identifies, "controlling images", the Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and Welfare Queen, continue to haunt the portrayals of Black women in

mainstream visual culture. Within the music video industry, the video vixen role too often collapsed into the Jezebel/hoochie stereotype, as Adams and Fuller (2006) argue, reinforcing assumptions of deviance and hypersexuality.

As a darker-skinned woman and founder of X3I, I grappled deeply with the moral implications of participating in and simultaneously seeking to disrupt this visual economy. The embodied tensions I experienced align with the principles of DEP, where creative practitioners must navigate the dual burden of survival and resistance within hostile cultural environments.

As the business expanded, so too did my role. No longer solely focused on manifesting my personal vision, I now carried the responsibility of nurturing the professional dreams and futures of my team. This required a fundamental shift in my leadership approach, from survivalist to strategist. I had to think critically about how to grow X3I, cultivate a culture of empowerment, and position the company within a male-dominated industry that placed additional barriers before women, particularly women of colour (Wallenberg & Janssen, 2021).

Leading X3I demanded an active embodiment of DEP: the synthesis of creative innovation, entrepreneurial strategy, and collective care as methods for carving out survival and resistance within the creative economy. I was acutely aware that for women across all racial and ethnic lines, entertainment spaces remained fraught with exclusions, and that for Black women, these barriers carried distinct mental, physical, and psychological costs (Carr et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2012; Kilgore et al., 2020). Anticipating these realities, I understood that sustaining both the business and my own wellness would require strategic coping mechanisms, anchored in communal empowerment and diasporic solidarity, principles central to TDBFE.

*“To be what you wish
You gotta be what you are
Only thing I'm missin'
Is a black guitar

I'm a rockstar
Hey baby, I'm a rockstar”*

Rockstar 101 – Rhianna ft Slash 2009 

The following image captures the X3I brochure for potential clients reflecting our new diversification strategy.



X3I, founded by Award winning Director Samuel Alesci, award winning Costume Designer, Fashionista, Robinson making a name for herself when the media and entertainment industry her name can be seen in major award winning TV, Day as costume designer, and as the producer on two time award winning reality film, as well as countless music video to grace the screens of MTV, Euro and various R&B.

The X3I brand houses 4 unique depts:

X3I Services made up of fashion stylist, Make-up artist, entertainment, performance and precise as well as creative PR and Marketing, bringing us to an international platform.

X3I Ladies presents our branded video vixen, homages, fashion models which can be found on channels including MTV Base, AKA, like exotics, catwalks, editorial.

X3I Sweet treats Bakery which is our 'sweet treats' gifted to all of our clients, and made to order for special occasions and finally

X3I Indulgence, X3I has also developed relationships with some of the most prestigious names in fashion, media, music and entertainment, including international award winning designers Samantha Dale London, Gavin Douglas, soapbox, disorder and a number of alternative and prestigious brands. Now indulgence is bringing you there raw Unleash the female warrior collection and made to measure dresses.

Our brand donates 25% of our earnings goes towards funding programmes for inner city youth bridging the gap between community and industry, by engage, stimulate, train, and develop the long transferable skills. We target a variation of young people from the exceptionally talented to the vulnerable, at risk, disadvantaged young people with the hope to build confidence, create an industry, develop discipline and provide a platform to a happier, inspirational future.

So how can you enjoy the first class treatment of The X3I brand, take a journey around our site, contact our management team via Tel or email and we will do our best to meet your needs within your budget.

X3I Stylist

Our fashion stylist service has been known to film, theatre, dance, and the music industry, and their clients get their attention to detail, with a personal consultation.

Our stylist is able to gain a full understanding of your needs, whether for your self for a special occasion or models at your events or show, an artist or whatever the need, we can create a look list suits your needs.

Explaining size, shape colour, professional look support this fashion experience is one set to last you for a life time.

We are also able to tap into our designer and retail sources to provide you with the perfect, fringe as well as create customized pieces in house from our indulgence styling team.

Our prices are very competitive, so we would love to hear from you.

X3I Make-Up Artist

Our selection of make-up artists, are professionally trained and use a range of techniques and professional products that can create a range of looks, are make-up artists are friendly and are able to work with all skin types.

Our artists offer a consultation where you can create a look in advance to suit your themes and the styling, our artists know how to bring out the best in your beauty, eradicate imperfections and transform you to a new character.

Images: 8 -13 X3I promotional Booklet



X3I Entertainment

Whether you need a model for a corporate event, a host at a live / club event, backing or just to promote your product, X3I will provide you with a professional model, styled, with brand knowledge, and tailored to your client needs.



X3I Music Video

Our music video packages are our best kept secret, bringing luxury to the video set we ensure models and artists (dependent upon package)

We do mini facials, mini manicure on our clients, make-up, hair styling, fashion styling and hair styling. The music video experience can also be used for your personal night out in order to transform you into the ultimate vixen, sexy chic, rock, chic, Barbie, etc. making sure your night is Showstopper.



X3I Creative Professionals

This package is for those looking for behind the scenes roles including choreography, line producer, creative treatment writing.

Contact us for further information.



X3I PR & Marketing

For creative marketing campaigns, PR stunts and media profiling we push the boundaries.

Contact us for more information.



XI Boot Camp

X3I is hosting its 2011 boot camp training for aspiring models, dancers, performers and beautiful women who just want to develop their confidence.

Boot camp will include:

- Dance workshops / professional training
- Equuside classes
- Performance skills
- Confidence and fitness training
- Seminars by leading inspirational women

X3I bootcamp is a platform our brand has created to allow women entering the entertainment and media industry a series of seminars, workshops, and creative outlets, that allow the knowledge, understanding of the backstage to the industry, as well as building confidence on the inner and outer woman.

Bootcamp also will offer intense dance and performance training to its participants.

Travelling from city to city in the UK working on bridging the gap between community talents and the industry X3I boot camp is definitely something to take part in.

Register online at www.X3I.com now for more details.

The X3I Ladies introduced a first team of branded female models. Our models are professionally trained and experienced in various genres of the music and entertainment industry.

With their credits stretching from runway shows, V.I.P events, editorial, music videos and now embarking on the forth coming series, this team of ladies are definitely bringing something special to the industry.

The X3I ladies represent a power house movement, more than video vixens, models, and promo girls, these ladies are part of a movement to strengthen the presence of strong, confident women within the entertainment and media industry.

All our X3I ladies are encouraged to embrace their additional skills and channel them into the company and industry so they become business women in their own right while being part of such a strong organized movement.

Being the first UK brand of women of this nature the X3I ladies bring a special feature to your project as well as the entire package and elite finish we expect in entertainment and media we bring the fantasy to life.

So X3I present true Power Passion and Perfection the X3I ladies...



X3I Bakery

Freshly Baked Homemade sweet treats from our luxury cupcakes to your very own celebration.

Taste the sweet sensation of X3I.

Whatever the occasion or event you can indulge both you and your guests with the X3I Bakery luxury sweet treats.

Hand delivered and distributed by The X3I lady of your choice, X3I are guaranteed to leave you a sweet taste in your mouth. X3I BAKERY

INDULGENCE BY X3I

The quality garments made for the woman who is elegant, proud, distinguished and sexy. Couture clothing that highlight the power passion perfection in you.



X3I indulgence is a made to measure brand designed for those who like to mix class with extravagance, using only the finest materials all our clothing is beautifully tailored to enhance the woman figure while bring out her power passion and perfection.

25% of all purchases goes towards Zeal contemporary (youth) organisation providing innovative and accredited creative projects for inner city young people in order to empower.

SOL is an international award winning designer from London Fashion Week to New York Fashion Week's best brand with her worldwide distribution endless editorial spreads, interviews and more. A store collection, X3I celebrate the UK's Bikartha Cole.

GD is an international superstar from Caribbean Fashion Week, London Fashion Week, ANDRETTI Rip the Runway, designing for Estelle, Kelly Rowland, endless A-list celebrities and runway. Gavin Douglas is one of the UK's finest, X3I celebrate Gavin Douglas.

Images: 14-23 X3I Booklet continued

X3I, originally rooted in female empowerment through video modelling, quickly expanded into a dynamic creative collective. We introduced beauty services, mobile hairdressing, makeup artistry (drawing on my qualifications and retail experience), media styling, massage therapy, nail services and even a boutique bakery offering bespoke cupcakes for events. Each booking became a curated experience blending aesthetics, entrepreneurship, and cultural pride.

Demand grew rapidly, extending to private bookings for hen nights and ladies' nights, and culminating in our first major showcase: a live photoshoot and demonstration in an upscale penthouse setting. This marked a new phase for X3I, where creative labour became a strategy for financial independence and collective empowerment.

X3I's rising profile soon led to an invitation to speak at Europe's largest Hip Hop Conference, alongside leading figures in Hip Hop culture. Determined to share the opportunity, I brought members of the team with me to represent X3I internationally.

Watching the women network, perform, and embody the spirit of X3I on a global stage felt like a dream realised. What began as a vision on my living room floor had grown into a transnational movement, affirming the transformative power of creativity, collective ambition, and diasporic resilience.



Image 24: X3I Power campaign **Image 25:** X3I "Death B4 Dishonour Campaign

(Image 5 was taken in Handsworth on an alleyway near a dear family friend's home, he had lent us the bike, and years later he would die in a bike accident. Image 6, the outfit made for this shoot was designed by me and built up of black roses). I was the creative director and photographer in a true emerging entrepreneurial style.



Image 26 A campaign shoot was done for an emerging streetwear brand. **Image 27:** A lingerie shoot for the X3I boutique INDULGENCE label.

Credit: Creative Director



Image 28 and **Image 29** were X3I campaign shoots with bespoke designed INDULGENCE garments.

Image 30: Emerging artist single cover



Image 33: Gavin Douglas Campaign shoot at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery featuring X3I model and behind the scenes of earlier shoots

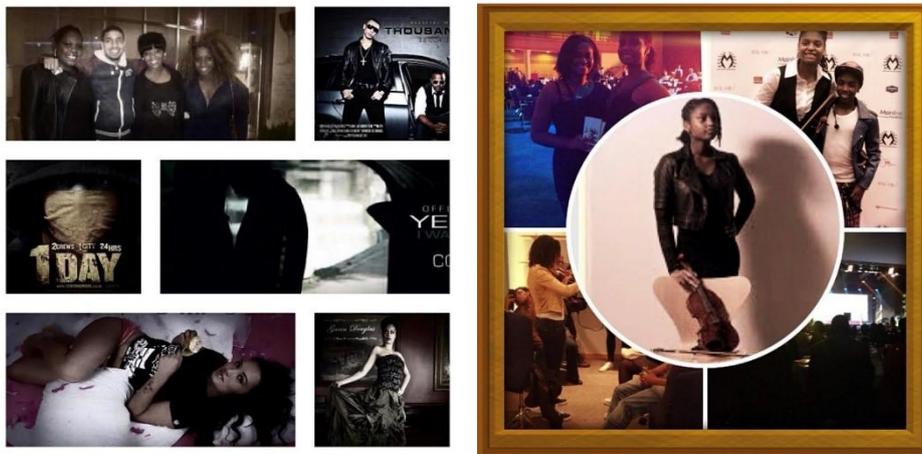


Image 34: Some music Video scenes and X3I features **Image 35:**  artist I brought from Holland to the UK for the MVISA awards to perform.

I created a promotional trailer that quickly gained traction among industry players in London, The Netherlands, and the USA. However, it was later removed without my consent, another painful reminder of how men in the industry attempted to assert dominance over what I was building. Despite this setback, the trailer had already helped forge meaningful connections, and the experience deepened my understanding of the need for caution when navigating the industry's gendered power dynamics.

As X3I's popularity grew, I became increasingly aware of the commodification of women's images within the entertainment sector. Women were often portrayed as decorative, fetishised, manipulative, or submissive figures, roles deeply entrenched in the hyper-sexualised representations critiqued by Hobson and Bartlow (2008). In many ways, X3I had to navigate and at times, inadvertently perpetuate these stereotypes to carve out space for visibility and empowerment.

Balancing the demands of capitalism and exploitation with feminist praxis created profound internal tensions. As a BFCEM operating within Hip Hop and entertainment spaces, I struggled, and continue to struggle, with the expectation that women's aesthetics must be leveraged to attract opportunities and income. Negotiating this terrain remains one of the most complex aspects of my journey.

Nevertheless, as the founder of X3I, I was adamant that neither the women within the collective nor I would be subjected to derogatory treatment or reduced to objects. It became imperative to carefully manage our presentation, ensuring that we retained agency, dignity, and autonomy amidst an industry deeply shaped by gendered and racialised expectations.

“You can call me a bitch; you can call me whatever you want as long as I leave with what I came for then that’s my job done.”

-Kimora Lee Simmons (2006)

From Mommy Guilt to Global Vision: The Journey of Expanding X3I

Being a “boss,” taking 4 additional women to Europe, sitting on panels with the Hip Hop elite, and having my voice and perspectives heard on women in Hip Hop was out of this world, just 9 months previously I was writing out a business plan for this vision and now it was a reality.



Image 36: A few of the X3I Team and CEO of Digi wax media **Image 37:** influential women in music across the globe for the women in Hip Hop Panel (UK, Holland, Cape Verde, Malaysia, USA)



Image 38 Miss Nathania and Drumma Boy (American Producer known for tracks with Bun B, Yo Gotti, Yung Joc, Usher, Trey Songz, Rick Ross, 2 Chainz, Snoop Dog, and more)



Image 39: Mum and Dad at MVISA awards show where I had provided the Hip Hop Violinist

*“Back against the wall, middle fingers in the air
Busting through the crowd, they gon' feel me now
Straight shooter from the hip, yeah, we heavy in here
Tell me get 'em, then I got 'em”*

SZA, Dj Khaled Just us (2019) 

Stepping into the lavish 5-star hotel ahead of the Hip Hop conference, I was thrust into a world of networking and opportunity. Meeting the CEO of a company I admired and later connecting with influential managers, writers, and executives felt surreal. Over the week, these interactions opened doors, yet it was striking how London-based influencers largely ignored me, until they noticed my engagement with American gatekeepers. This revealed the ego dynamics within the UK scene, contrasting sharply with the more open reception from U.S. industry leaders.

Taking my place on the women in Hip Hop panel, representing Caribbean and Black British voices, I felt the weight of responsibility. Sharing space with women from across the globe, I understood the significance of my presence. Validation from esteemed editors and industry insiders reaffirmed the journey from a young girl enamoured with Hip Hop culture during NYC summers to an emerging voice within the industry. Their public praise for X3I's success in under 12 months left me in awe, and wishing I had been bold enough to seek further mentorship at the time.

Throughout the conference, I immersed myself in VIP experiences alongside American delegates, receiving direct advice on expanding X3I into artist development and navigating demo deals. Though the latter felt more complex, newfound relationships and access to emerging artists emboldened me to pursue these paths. An opportunity soon emerged to collaborate with award-winning artists, prompting a temporary relocation to the Netherlands, a milestone signalling X3I's growing international reach.

Balancing these ambitions with the realities of "mommy guilt" was deeply challenging. Leaving my young child for extended periods was emotionally fraught. Here, the model of "other-mothering," central to Black feminist thought and practised within my family (Collins, 2000; Hill Collins, 2009; Edwards, 2021), became vital. My father's unwavering support also reinforced the intergenerational commitment to pursuing transformative opportunities.

Living in Rotterdam presented both promise and difficulty. Language barriers were daunting, yet I was buoyed by the vibrant diasporic community of Cape Verdean and Surinamese creatives. Engaging with American artists remotely, long before remote collaborations became standard, offered new professional dimensions. Amid homesickness, I found comfort in the streets of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, embracing the eclectic fashion, street life, and new friendships.

Despite moments of linguistic fumbling, I worked to integrate locally, attending weddings, building networks, and navigating unfamiliar spaces. This experience deepened my understanding of spatial belonging, how Black women cultivate mobility, safety, and community across transnational terrains. It illuminated an essential aspect of my second

research question: BFCEMs often pursue positionality, upward mobility, and power by transcending local environments and building national and international networks.

After months of evolving X3I into X3I Creative Global, it became clear that the journey was only beginning. Although my international network expanded, the UK scene remained characterised by weak infrastructure and limited access to game-changing resources. My background in dance and artist networking offered an advantage, but navigating the creative business landscape still demanded greater expertise.

Recognising the growing need to diversify and formalise X3I's trajectory, I discovered a master's programme in Creative Entrepreneurship in London. It felt tailor-made for my aspirations, offering the strategic knowledge and sector-specific insights necessary to propel X3I to new heights as a Black female entrepreneur in the competitive, rapidly evolving creative economy.



Image 40: Image 41: Artist and Entrepreneur Laisse Sanchez who became a friend



Image 42: Singers both have gone on to have successful music careers.

A Journey of Persistence: From Bedroom Reflections to Academic Revival

As summer faded and X3I's business slowed, I lay in bed pondering my next steps. How would I sustain income for myself and the X3I women now that the season of work was ending? Some team members expressed their desire to pursue independent endeavours, a bittersweet moment that marked both a loss and a fulfilment of my vision to empower them toward confidence, independence, and stability, even if that journey no longer included me.

Although I considered recruiting a new cohort, especially given the flood of emails from women exploited on unpaid sets, something deeper called me. My spirit urged me to pause, to learn, and to fully understand what I had built before expanding it further.

Scrolling late at night through business courses, label jobs, and creative opportunities, nothing resonated until a sudden instinct directed me to university websites. Battling internal doubts rooted in earlier academic experiences, I stumbled upon an MA in Creative Entrepreneurship in London set to begin within weeks. I applied immediately and was offered an interview.

"You are no shrinking violet," said Ian Chance, the course director, at the close of our meeting (UEA, 2013). He offered me a place on the course a week before it began. Elated, I envisioned how this could equip me to elevate X3I. Yet reality set in: I had no clear way to pay the fees or manage the logistics of commuting to London twice a week.

Nevertheless, where there was will, there would be a way. I boarded 5:30 a.m. coaches to London, studying from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. before rushing home, exhausted, by 9 p.m. and repeating the cycle the next day. Despite the physical toll, I was always the first to arrive and the last to leave the classroom.

This experience stood in stark contrast to previous educational environments. Here, identity was not scrutinised, I wasn't a "Black woman from the hood" or a "single mother", I was simply a creative. Our cohort of ten spanned rappers, sculptors, fine artists, digital creatives, and writers from the USA, Africa, China, and the UK. We were encouraged to trust our creativity and show up authentically. In this environment, the "mummy guilt" faded; I found liberation through creative learning.

Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* (2016) suggests that security and safe creative companionship are essential to artistic fulfilment; this course embodied that principle. Although the curriculum wasn't centred around Black womanhood, London's vibrant, diverse setting nurtured my aspirations in ways previous spaces had not.

Soon, financial pressures loomed again. I had no concrete plan to cover tuition, but once my course leader learned of my situation, he helped secure a scholarship covering half the fees, with the university agreeing to defer the remainder until after graduation on the condition that I "*show up and show out.*" The relief was indescribable; for the first time in months, I could focus wholly on growth rather than survival.

Yet, as autumn deepened, a new challenge emerged: the creeping exhaustion of relentless commuting, burnout lurked on the horizon.

A Haven of Healing: Finding Myself Through Miss P's Unwavering Support

"Perhaps I can say this all more simply, I say the love of a woman healed me."

Lorde, A. (1980) p 52

In the intricate tapestry of my life, Miss P emerged as a pivotal figure, a beacon of love, generosity, and unwavering support. After months of intense commuting, I reached out to her. Though we hadn't seen each other in years, she welcomed me instantly, urging me to collect the keys to her London home without hesitation. Miss P wasn't just offering a place to stay; she offered sanctuary, becoming my "Other Mother", a confidant whose presence wrapped me in comfort, safety, and unconditional belief.

Living with Miss P two to three days a week, I found refuge from the chaos of travel and study, knowing my daughter remained safe with family. Our shared meals, long conversations, and quiet companionship nurtured a bond that transcended any practical arrangement. Miss P's faith in me, her unwavering affirmation of my path, became an anchor as I navigated the complexities of academia and creative ambition.

Yet as I delved deeper into my studies, doubts crept in. Despite initial excitement over my dissertation, an immersive theatre piece exploring spiritual warfare in the entertainment industry, unease gnawed at me. The project, while ambitious, no longer felt fully aligned with my evolving sense of purpose.

This realisation signalled a deeper transformation. I began questioning whether my true calling lay beyond the confines of conventional academia or even artistic performance. My desire to rebuild and relaunch X3I flickered uncertainly amidst these reflections. Through it all, Miss P's presence remained a steady light, guiding me through the labyrinth of my

aspirations. What came next would shift everything, forever transforming my trajectory, a journey explored in the next chapter, "I Am My Father's Daughter."

Conclusion

*"This a celebration, this is levitation
Look at how you winning now?
This to dedication; this is meditation
Higher education; this the official competitor elimination.....

my memories only happy images
This is for the hood, this is for the kids
This is for the single mothers, n** doing bids.

It's a celebration (For the ghetto)

It's times like these (Ooh, ooh)
They know who we are (They know who we are)
Champion, the champions (Champion, champion)"*

Nicki Minaj (2009) Champion 

This chapter has traced the intricate intersections of motherhood, creative entrepreneurship, and the entertainment industry, answering the third research question by examining how Hip Hop culture both influences and is reimagined by BFCEMs. Through the frameworks of DEP and TDBF), it foregrounds how BFCEMs strategically navigate, resist, and transform SPEC landscapes.

Building on Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) and theories of cultural identity, this chapter illuminated themes of transformative entrepreneurship, spiritual connectivity, diasporic community-building, and intersectionality. It critically addressed the dual role of Hip Hop as both a platform for agency and a contested space laden with systemic racialised and gendered barriers (Harrison & Arthur, 2019).

Through the case of X3I, the narrative demonstrated how entrepreneurship becomes not merely an economic act but a radical, community-centred praxis. Spiritual grounding, familial support, and diasporic solidarity emerged as vital resources for building resilience and pursuing upward mobility, challenging normative models of entrepreneurial success rooted in individualism and capitalist extraction (Audretsch, 2020; Turman, 2019).

Yet the chapter also interrogated the tensions inherent in leveraging visibility within exploitative visual economies, where colourism, "controlling images" (Collins, 2000), and commodification persist (Halliday, 2022; Hunter, 2007). X31's operational ethos, prioritising authenticity, collective empowerment, and creative agency, illustrated an alternative model, one informed by Black feminist ethics of care, creativity, and community (hooks, 1984).

Ultimately, this chapter contends that BFCEMs in Hip Hop culture engage in a dynamic form of transformative entrepreneurship: one that weaves together personal narratives, cultural production, and political resistance. Through DEP and TDBFE, it becomes clear that these women are not simply navigating systems, they are actively shaping them, creating new paradigms of empowerment, belonging, and diasporic mobility across the transatlantic world.

This work not only documents personal and collective struggles but also contributes to broader conversations on identity, entrepreneurship, and social change, offering a critical intervention into how Black women's creativity, labour, and leadership are understood within contemporary cultural economies.

I AM MY FATHER'S DAUGHTER

Themes: Music & Connectivity, Wellbeing, Transformation & Adversity

Nathania; A Name, A Legacy, and the Melodies That Shaped Me

The significance of one's name delves into the depths of personal, cultural, familial, and historical connections. Names ground us in identity, serving as a bridge to ancestral legacies and communal affiliations. Black feminist scholars emphasise that names connect individuals to “genealogies of struggle” (Collins, 2000), while theologians like Cone (1970) argue that names affirm divine purpose and dignity in a world that often seeks to erase identity. It is because of this that I posit that our names serve as the foundational marker of identity, shaping our understanding of self, our affiliations with communities, and our position in the broader tapestry of existence.

Had fate taken a different course, my identity might have been etched with the regal resonance of Melchizedek - "My King Is [the god] Sendek" or "My King Is Righteousness", a reflection of my father's aspirations for his first-born son. Yet, destiny ordained otherwise, and I emerged his firstborn daughter therefore named Nathania - "God's Gift" or "Given by God", emblematic of divine providence but also in homage to the familial lineage epitomised by my grandfather Nathaniel, my mother's father. It was on the dawn of April 5th, 1983, when I arrived in the echoes of my father's April 4th birthday celebration and was given this name.

During my upbringing and reflecting on “Frames of Power (photo ethnography), my father stood as the dependable, loving and protective guardian of my emerging selfhood, fostering an environment where authenticity could flourish unencumbered by judgment. In his wisdom, he recognised that the alchemy of genuine love demanded a combination of tender ingredients including care, affection, acknowledgement, reverence, dedication, trust, and the cornerstone of honest, uninhibited communication, echoing the sentiments of bell hooks (2001).

In the melodic embrace of our household, music became the vibrant tapestry upon which our joys were painted. Each Saturday morning, the  Sounds of Blackness would awaken us seamlessly segueing into the soulful cadences of Soul to Soul, Luther Vandross, Cameo,

Chaka Khan, Snap, Neneh Cherry, Mary J Blige, Alexander O'Neal, and a myriad of other soulful songs of the 80's and 90's. Here, amidst the rhythm and melody, alongside my father's presence, I found solace, belonging, and the boundless expanse of possibility.

As the music pulsed through our veins, we danced, we laughed, we cleaned the house, and washed the cars, my hair would get washed and styled and in those fleeting moments, I unwittingly immersed myself in a symphony of love, a practice so innate and profound, that it resonated within the very depths of my soul.

Melodies of Memory: A Father, a daughter, and the Language of Music"

*Don't give up and don't give in
Although it seems you never win
You will always pass the test
As long as you keep your head to the sky
You can win as long as you keep your head to the sky
You can win as long as you keep your head to the sky
Face toward the sky
Be optimistic.*

Sounds of Blackness- Optimistic (1991) 

In the earlier years of my father's life, a chapter of musical legacy unfolds, woven with the threads of camaraderie, creativity, and cultural resonance. Before fatherhood claimed his focus, he strode the stages of musical expression, wielding his guitar amidst the brotherhood of "Black Symbol" alongside his kin and cherished companions. They sit among the unsung heroes of British Reggae. Their harmonies whispered tales of unsung heroism, carving a niche distinct from the shadow of more heralded counterparts.

Emerging in the tapestry of 1978 onwards, Black Symbol eschewed imitation in favour of innovation, crafting melodies that transcended genre boundaries and ushered listeners into realms of spiritual introspection and socio-political discourse. Their music, a symphony of faith and fervour, served as a beacon of inclusivity, drawing souls of all persuasions into its embrace.

In the chronicles of Birmingham's musical lore, Black Symbol's presence looms large, their vision manifesting in the coveted "Handsworth Explosion" volumes curated under the stewardship of my uncle Fatman, a luminary whose memory persists even in his transition. Despite the adulation within local circles, their independent releases grappled with the constraints of limited exposure, their melodies confined to the echelons of niche markets.

Rooted in the verdant soils of St. Ann's on Jamaica's North coast, the essence of Black Symbol echoed the rhythms of ancestral homelands, forging a musical tapestry that bore the indelible imprints of cultural heritage. At its core stood a trinity of brothers Fatman, Blobo, and Rhino their kinship mirrored in the harmonies that reverberated across stages and souls alike.

For my father, music was more than melody; it was a vessel of spirituality, a conduit through which the divine and the earthly converged. In his benevolence, he bestowed upon me the gift of musicality, infusing my days with rhythm and resonance, wherein the absence of music rendered existence incomplete.

As I reflect upon the melodic tapestry of my upbringing, I am honoured to bear witness to the legacy of Black Symbol, a testament to the enduring power of harmony and the unbreakable bonds of family and music. See the Black Symbol Live performance of my dad and uncles including my uncle in the audience,  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iETtS6Udmds>



Order in both images: 43 & 44 Blobo, Fatman, Rhino



Image: 45 Black Symbol members and others

Embedded within the tapestry of my earliest memories lies a symphony of shared experiences with my father, each note resonating with the vibrancy of live performances and the boundless exuberance of youth. Among these cherished recollections, one stands out vividly - my concert experience during  Mc Hammer's *"Please Hammer Don't Hurt em"* tour in 1990, supported by Snap. Immersed in the rhythms of MC Hammer's beats, I revelled in the electrifying spectacle before me, captivated by the mesmerising dancers, particularly "No Bones", whose movements defied gravity with effortless grace. In emulation of my idol, I fashioned an ensemble reminiscent of Hammer's iconic attire, complete with gold baggy pants and a matching half jacket.

Though hindsight reveals the folly of my fashion choices, in that fleeting moment, confidence and freedom enveloped me in a cocoon of youthful exuberance.

Accompanied by my father, a towering figure cloaked in his signature dark shades, I navigated the throngs of concertgoers, unaware of the surreptitious glances and murmurs that followed in our wake. It wasn't until years later, through idle conversation, that I unearthed the revelation of mistaken identity, with my father unwittingly assuming the mantle of  SNAP's lead artist amidst the sea of adoring fans.

As the years unfurled like the rhythm of a melodic cadence, our concert excursions evolved, each outing a testament to the evolving tapestry of musical influences woven into the fabric of our shared journey.

By 1998 we went to see  Destiny Child at one of their early appearances in Birmingham, Aston it was the original Destiny Child. As they performed their most popular songs including "No No No, Say My Name and Killing Time, they stopped and asked for a guy to come on the stage that guy happened to be my Godbrother, and he was ecstatic, little did he know then that it would be a core memory, my dad was once again the centre of attention I couldn't believe all the people he knew and who continuously showed him respect. I looked on in admiration.

By roughly 1998/1999 I had become a huge  DMX fan, I had posters all over my bedroom wall, and the It's *Dark and Hell is Hot and Flesh of my Flesh, Blood of my Blood* albums on repeat which were in line with my love for hip-hop was growing in line with my visits to New York. This show was different to the rest of them it connected rough aggressive explicit rap with intense prayers to close out every show, which sent shivers through me and even tears, I had seen it on TV but in reality, it was out of this world.

Yet, beyond the realm of concert halls and stage lights, music permeated the very essence of our familial dynamic, transcending mere entertainment to become the cornerstone of our shared language of love. We would compare music and collect outrageous amounts, I don't think there was a Hip Hop, R&B, Soul or Funk, tape, CD or record, mix tape or album we didn't have, we had everything from Morgan Heritage, Total, Beenie Man, to Soul to Soul and many more.

Within the hallowed halls of my father's lineage, music was not merely a pastime but a legacy, an indelible thread binding us in a symphony of shared heritage and collective memory. This aligned with his Rastafarian ideology, where music served as a vehicle for spiritual resistance and Black liberation (Campbell, 1987; Murrell et al., 1998). As Gilroy (1993) asserts, music in Black diasporic culture transcends mere entertainment, fostering unity and resistance.



Image 46: One of our family gatherings.



Image 47: Dad playing music at our family BBQ.



Image 48: Capturing my dad dancing to Candy by cameo he has nicknamed the Formation King as he was the lead at every party whenever this song came on.

*It's like candy
I can feel it when you walk
Even when you talk it takes over me
You're so dandy
I wanna know, can you feel it too
Just like I do? (Just like I do, hoo)*

*This stuff is starting now
It's the same feeling
I always seem to get around you
There's no mistaking, I'm clearly taken
By the simple mere thought of you (oh)*

Cameo – Candy (1986) 

When considering the profound impact of music, it becomes evident that it serves as more than mere entertainment; it is a conduit for connectivity and a language of love. Through the lens of Black feminist thought, this chapter of the autoethnography attempts to discern how music fosters bonds, nurture's identity, and cultivates expressions of freedom and joy.

Reflecting on the relationship between myself and my father, music emerged as our shared love language, weaving threads of joy, safety, and freedom into the fabric of our connection. In embracing melodies and rhythms, I found a sanctuary to explore my voice and identity, buoyed by his unwavering emotional and material support. This narrative echoes the insights of Schäfer et al. (2014), who suggest that musical experiences not only unveil one's innermost self but also empower individuals to pursue their aspirations authentically.

Moreover, the intertwining of music and connectivity resonates profoundly within Black feminist discourse. Similar to the spiritual connections experienced by Black women, the bonds forged through music transcend the tangible, offering solace, solidarity, and strength.

Research by Eerola et al. (2017), Gabrielsson (2011), Peltola and Eerola (2016), Sloboda and Juslin (2001), as well as Van den Tol and Edwards (2013), underscores the profound impact of music on fostering feelings of connectedness with loved ones. Whether through nostalgic melodies that evoke cherished memories or melancholic compositions that draw us closer in shared sorrow, music becomes a vessel for communion, bridging distances and deepening relationships.

In essence, viewing music through the TDBFE illuminates its role as a mode of survival, resistance, and spiritual grounding. Where music transcends mere expression and instead acts as a diasporic archive of shared experiences and knowledge, as Gilroy (1993) argues, connecting communities across borders through resistance to dominant narratives. I assert that music as a form of artistic expression is a powerful medium for cultivating empathy, understanding, and interconnectedness. This is echoed by Black feminist scholars like Collins (2000) and Boyce Davies (2008), who view music as a critical tool for fostering empathy, nurturing identity, and countering oppression. Rastafarian music, Murrell et al.

(1998) observes, embodies communal resilience, asserting collective identity and resistance against colonial legacies.

Echoes of Joy: Concerts, Connection, and the Mother-Daughter Bond

Music has come to play an equally profound role in my relationship with my daughter and me. Music has evolved beyond being a mere form of entertainment; it has become a love language through which we communicate and connect on a deeper level. Our home resonates with the rhythms and melodies that bring us joy and foster a sense of togetherness.

Attending concerts has been a significant part of our shared experience, shaping my daughter's formative years in remarkable ways. From Stormzy's tour twice following the pandemic to performances by  Dave, Teyana Taylor, and an array of other artists including Joe Badass, Shaniel Muir, Chris Brown, 50 Cent, Busta Rhymes, Ghetts, Kabaka Pyramid, A Boogie with the Hoodie, Fridayy, and Biran Messia, each concert has left an indelible mark on our memories.

These experiences not only bring us joy but also serve as a catalyst for bonding and mutual expression. Through music, we share ideas, emotions, and aspirations, deepening our connection and understanding of each other. It has become a medium through which we navigate life's challenges and celebrate its triumphs together.

Moreover, music has emerged as a powerful tool for my daughter's personal growth and exploration. It serves as therapy, offering solace and healing during difficult times. Additionally, it has sparked her interest in the creative industry, serving as a gateway for her to explore her creative talents and pursue her passion.

In essence, music has woven itself into the fabric of our lives, shaping our relationships and enriching our experiences in profound ways. As we continue to journey through life together, I am grateful for the transformative power of music and the boundless opportunities it affords us for connection, expression, and growth.



Image 49-51: Nay and Stormzy, Me Teyanna Taylor and Nay, Joey Badass and Nay

Roots of Justice: A Family Law Firm’s Journey Through Legacy and Community

“In my humble opinion, those who come to engage in debates of consequence, and who challenge accepted wisdom, should expect to be treated badly. Nonetheless, they must stand undaunted. That is required. And that should be expected. For it is bravery that is required to secure freedom.”

Clarence Thomas, Say It Plain (1948)

As my father transitioned into the legal profession becoming a Solicitor and establishing his law firm “Atkinson Spence Solicitors, a space he dedicated to his mother Rosa Mae Atkinson Rosa. Atkinson Spence Solicitors was located in the centre of our community representing what we now call Black excellence, it was a symbol of professionalism, success, and excellence. Embracing our familial legacy, both my Godbrother and I pursued careers as ILEX paralegals within my father's firm. Law came naturally to me, but I never really saw it as a long-term career, however, this collective endeavour not only preserved familial ties but also embodied my father's vision of community-driven entrepreneurship.

Operating within the sphere of my father's tutelage demanded a meticulous dedication to professionalism and discipline. From diligent notetaking to rigorous legal quizzing, his office cultivated an environment of rigour and excellence, shaping not only our professional acumen but also our personal ethos. This ethos transcended the confines of the workplace, permeating our domestic sphere. Decisions regarding leisure activities required exhaustive

preparation and persuasive argumentation, instilling in us the virtues of thoroughness and resilience.

My dad purposefully cultivated a team reflective of our community's diversity, he epitomised the ethos of inclusivity and empowerment. By nurturing a cadre of Black professionals across various roles within the firm, from legal experts to administrative staff, he transcended mere representation, fostering an ecosystem of support and opportunity, that allowed room for growth, professional development and financial stability all from what he would later refer to as the "Black Pound".

Nevertheless, in retrospect, my father's boundless compassion, while a source of strength, occasionally revealed vulnerabilities. Our conversations often grappled with the tension between empathy and discernment his unwavering faith in humanity juxtaposed with my pragmatic scrutiny of character.

Due to the nature of my dad's work and the lack of boundaries some community members had concerning personal space and time, my parents and younger sister relocated from our previous neighbourhood to a more affluent area, while I was living away at university, this marked a significant chapter in our lives. Upon my return and the birth of my daughter, I reclaimed the familial home, previously occupied by my God brother during the nascent stages of his own family.

Travel continued to be an integral aspect of our lives and became a cornerstone of our familial bonding rituals. Exploring diverse cultures, encountering new faces, and immersing ourselves in unfamiliar spaces became emblematic of our shared experiences. Rejecting the confines of resort life, even amidst the allure of five-star accommodations, we prioritised authentic engagement with the countries we visited, a testament to my father's commitment to experiential learning.

Aligned in thought yet distinct in approach, my father and I shared a symbiotic bond, each complementing the other's perceptiveness. While he envisioned the latent potential within individuals, I navigated the complexities of human nature, discerning nuances often concealed beneath surface interactions.

In essence, my journey within Atkinson Spences Solicitors was more than a professional apprenticeship, it was a holistic education in empathy, diligence, and advocacy. Under my father's mentorship, I honed the art of legal practice while embracing the nuances of human interaction, laying the foundation for both professional success and personal growth.

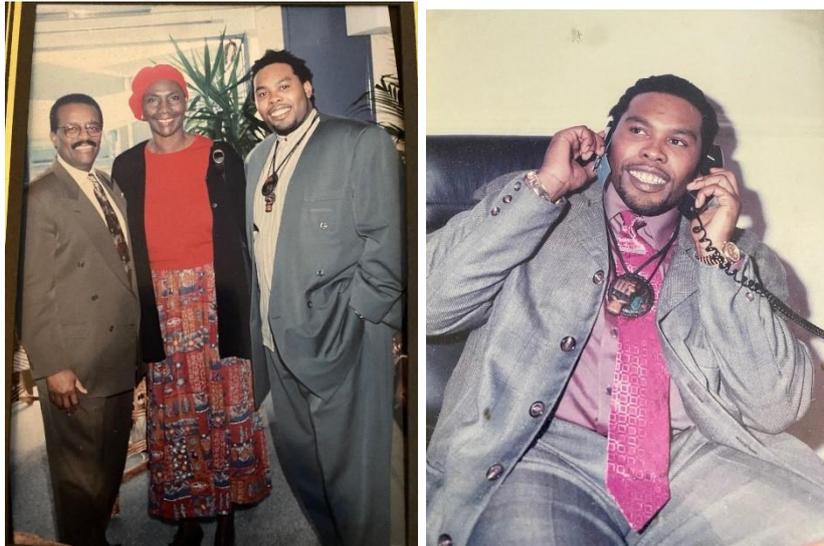


Image 52: Johnnie Cochran (Lead defence in O.J Simpson case, Black Female Lawyer, and my dad

Image 53: My dad in his office



Image 54: My dad on one of our family holidays **Image 55:** Atkinson Spence Business card

Shadows of Power: Battling Racism and Resilience in the Face of Adversity

The next chapter of my father’s journey was defined by the turbulence of his professional rise and the profound effects this turmoil had on our family. As he ascended to become one of the UK’s most sought-after solicitors, our family experienced a palpable sense of pride and accomplishment. Yet, this period of achievement was violently disrupted, a stark reminder, as Collins (2000) asserts, that for Black professionals, visibility often brings increased surveillance and institutional hostility.

The inflection point arrived when my father, a formidable and independent Black man, became the target of systemic forces intent on undermining his success. Leveraging tactics rooted in institutional racism, those threatened by his ascent orchestrated a campaign of

character assassination. False allegations of fraud, amplified by media sensationalism, were weaponised in a calculated effort to dismantle his life's work. "They", the powers that be, exploited community informants, attempted to dredge up rumours of patriots of pubs and local haunts, and pursued a tenuous case in a distant jurisdiction, threatening to strip my father not only of his career, but of his freedom.

The trial itself became a theatre of injustice. The jury and judge, confronted with the baselessness of the case, quickly returned a not-guilty verdict, some jurors even embracing my father in apology for the overt racism at play. In the aftermath, my father publicly condemned the systemic targeting of Black professionals, using the media as a platform to expose the pervasive bias faced by those who dare to challenge established power structures.

Despite his vindication, the ordeal left indelible scars. The relentless attacks sapped my father's spirit and reverberated throughout our family. Music, once the soundtrack of our joy and solidarity, was now weighed down by a heavy energy, echoing our collective distress. I felt a deep, silent rage at the audacity of those who tried to take my father away, anger interwoven with helplessness and grief.

The spectre of bankruptcy soon followed, casting our once vibrant home into a shadow of uncertainty. The music that had once filled our rooms with warmth fell silent, mirroring the emotional heaviness that settled over our daily lives.

Yet, within this darkness, brief moments of hope persisted. Watching my daughter with her grandfather, witnessing their laughter, their connection, offered fleeting glimpses of resilience and the enduring power of family bonds. These moments became our lifelines, evidence that even in the depths of adversity, love and legacy endure.

Here, the lens of DEP becomes critical: our bodies and homes became sites where trauma, resistance, and hope collided, where systemic violence was both enacted and resisted, and where everyday acts of survival were themselves forms of embodied praxis. TDBFE further contextualises these experiences, arguing that Black families and professionals in transatlantic contexts continually negotiate layered oppressions, transforming personal suffering into collective knowledge and resistance (Collins, 2000; Bell, 2020).

Beneath the surface, my own rage was attempting to transform into resolve, a determination to restore our family's dignity and future. That resolve crystallised on 25 May 2014, in a chance conversation with my father. Together, we began envisioning the resurrection of his law practice, reaffirming our shared refusal to be defeated by systemic injustice.

Yet, this brief resurgence of hope was fragile. The very next day, after a night spent labouring over my master's dissertation and discussing the law practice's revival, a single phone call shattered the illusion of stability, thrusting us into yet another cycle of uncertainty and upheaval. On May 26th My father died.

Reflecting on these events, I recognise that our story is not abnormal but deeply symptomatic of the precariousness Black professionals face under white supremacist capitalism. Our experience confirms what TDBFE posits: that Black womanhood and family are always entangled in a struggle for recognition, safety, and legacy, one that requires constant navigation of institutional and cultural landmines (Collins, 2000). In telling this story, I claim both my father's legacy and the right to theorise from lived experience, transforming private pain into public critique, and survival into insurgent praxis.

In this great future, you can't forget your past,

So, dry your tears, I say, yeah,

No woman no cry,

"My feet is my only carriage

And so I've got to push on through

But while I'm gone

Everything's gonna be all right

No Woman No Cry by Bob Marley & the Wailers (1974) 

A Legacy Worthy of Him: Resilience, Grief, and the Pursuit of Excellence

"It is far easier to talk about loss than it is to talk about love. It is easier to articulate the pain of love's absence than to describe its presence and meaning. (Bell Hooks Quote: "It is far easier to talk about loss than it is to ...")

bell hooks (2001)

In the crucible of life, we often encounter moments of profound challenge and intense emotion, where words seem inadequate, and action becomes our sole recourse. It is during

these crucibles that our faith is tested, and the depth of our resilience is laid bare. For me, such a moment arrived amidst the pursuit of my master's degree in creative entrepreneurship a juncture initially imbued with optimism and promise but soon eclipsed by the shadow of tragedy.

As I embarked on the journey of crafting my dissertation, envisioning it as a milestone of personal and professional growth, fate intervened with a cruel twist. The date etched in memory, May 26th forever altered the trajectory of my narrative. A solemn phone call shattered the tranquillity of the day, bearing news of my father's sudden hospitalisation, making no sense to me as he was not sick, so I knew something was not right.

With frantic urgency and a sense of foreboding, I joined the hurried procession to the hospital, a journey fraught with unspoken dread which seemed like we were travelling in slow motion with every light turning red. Upon arrival, a silent exchange with the hospital staff betrayed the gravity of the situation, leading me down corridors lined with sterile indifference until the stark reality unfolded before me.

In that sterile room, amidst the hushed whispers of medical professionals, I confronted the unthinkable my father, once a bastion of strength and guidance, now lay serene in his final repose. The world seemed to blur as shock enveloped me, numbing my senses to the mournful symphony of grief echoing around me.

Amidst the tumult of sorrow, my resolve crystallised a silent vow uttered amidst the palpable anguish. Somehow I was back outside and standing in the rain, saying aloud this cannot be real, my dad would never just leave me like this. A few people came out and said things, but I wasn't listening I was in complete shock I called my Godbrother and just remembered saying my dad was dead I didn't know till after but at that moment my God brother wrote his car off.

At first, I would not go back into the room where his body lay peacefully, instead, I walked around aimlessly and observed the family that was there, In reality, it is still a blur to this day. My godmother came to me and strongly suggested I go in the room, it was my godbrother and me at first, I just stood there looking, still frozen and then out of nowhere, I made a promise.

"I promise I am going to make it, I've got this," I whispered to the tranquil figure before me, a pledge to honour his legacy with unwavering determination. I was so frozen I could not cry scream or be physically sick, instead, I stood.

In the aftermath of loss, amidst the embrace of family and the solace of shared sorrow, I found strength in unity, drawing upon the resilience woven into the fabric of our familial

bonds. Together, we navigated the labyrinth of mourning, finding solace in collective remembrance and the enduring legacy of love and kinship.

Though the pain of loss remains an indelible mark on my journey, it also serves as a testament to the enduring spirit of resilience, a beacon of hope guiding me through the darkest of days. In the crucible of grief, I discovered a profound truth, that amidst the depths of despair, the human spirit possesses an innate capacity for renewal and growth, a testament to the resilience of the human heart.

The loss of my father was not just the absence of a loved one; it was the shattering of my foundation, the rupture of a sacred bond, and the extinguishing of a guiding light. With his passing, I not only mourned the loss of his presence but also the forfeiture of his unwavering support and affirmation. The prospect of no longer witnessing his pride and excitement in my accomplishments left a profound void a silence pierced by the crescendo of rage and determination that surged within me.

In the aftermath of tragedy, grief threatened to immobilise me, to suffocate me beneath its weighty embrace. Yet, amidst the tempest of sorrow, a relentless resolve emerged a primal instinct to persevere, endure, and honour his legacy with unwavering determination. In the crucible of loss, I found myself transformed to a warrior woman fuelled by an unyielding commitment to uphold his memory and the values he instilled in me.

The mundane tasks of daily life became inconsequential against the backdrop of planning a funeral and navigating the complexities of grief while striving to complete my dissertation. The scholarly pursuits that once held precedence now paled in comparison to the urgent need to immortalise my father's legacy to tell the story of an invisible leader whose influence reverberated far beyond his mortal coil.

Amidst the chaos of funeral arrangements, familial obligations, and the demands of single parenthood, I remained steadfast in my resolve, deaf to the well-meaning advice urging me to pause, to grieve, to surrender to despair. For me, there was no option but to press forward to honour the promise I made to myself and my father to persevere, to succeed, to thrive in his absence.

As days turned into weeks and weeks into months, I found solace not in tears or retreat but in action, in the relentless pursuit of excellence and the unwavering commitment to carve out a legacy worthy of his name. The emergence of a new iteration of myself, a woman fuelled by determination, fortified by resilience, and propelled by an unyielding drive for success was not a concession to weakness but a testament to strength forged in the crucible of adversity.

In the face of doubt, criticism, and the spectre of my vulnerability, I remained resolute a beacon of strength and determination, guided by the singular purpose of honouring my father's memory through the pursuit of excellence. For me, success was not just an aspiration; it was a mandate a sacred vow to ensure that his legacy endured, that his name was synonymous with triumph, and that his influence continued to shape the trajectory of my life and beyond. Anything less would be a betrayal of the promise I made a failure to uphold the essence of the man who shaped me in life and in death.

"I say fly away home to Zion (Fly away home), I say one bright morning when my work is over, I will fly away home"

Bob Marley – Rastaman Chant Live (1973) 

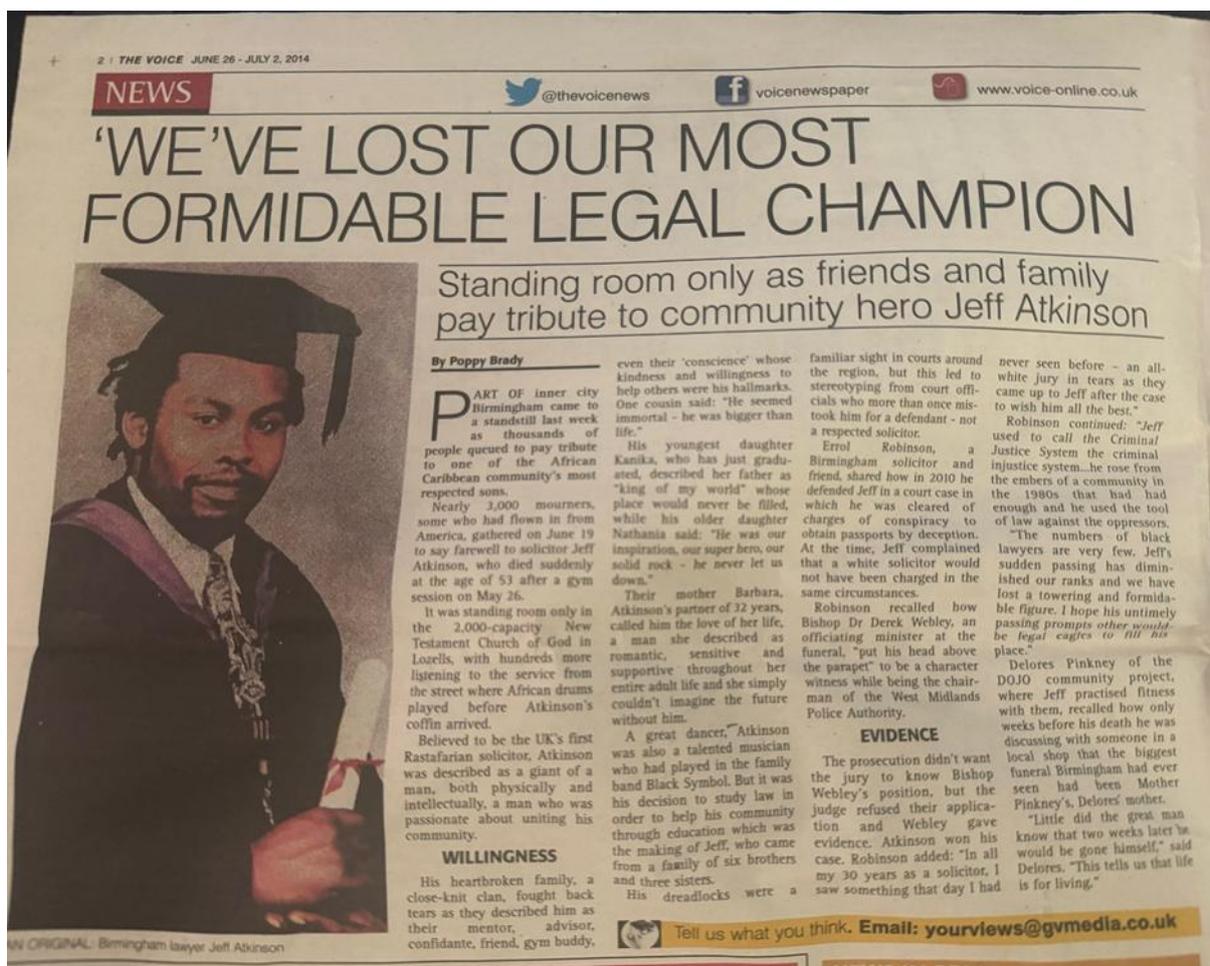


Image 56: The Voice Newspaper article

*Paid the cost to be the boss
Paid the cost to be the boss
I've paid the cost to be the boss*

*Look at me
Know what you see
See a bad mother*

The Boss – James Brown (Procession song) (1973) 

June 19th, 2014 marked the solemn occasion of bidding farewell to my father a titan of the legal profession, a pillar of the community, and, above all, my guiding light. As over 3000 mourners gathered to pay their respects, the air hummed with reverence and the echo of his legacy. The Voice Newspaper's tribute immortalised him as a "formidable lawyer and man of the community," a testament to the indelible mark he left on all who knew him.

Amidst the sea of mourners and the cacophony of tributes, I stood at the graveside, enveloped in a kaleidoscope of emotions. The vibrant energy of the crowd mirrored his spirit, and though grief threatened to overwhelm me, a whisper of warmth from Beenie Brown touched my soul. "*He has been received as king,*" the words resonated, though I dared not shed a tear, lest it betray the steely resolve that fortified me.

In the aftermath of loss, grief manifested in unexpected ways, its tendrils weaving through the fabric of my existence, triggering panic attacks that threatened to engulf me as they began to happen multiple times a day every day. Yet, amidst the chaos, I remained resolute, driven by an unyielding determination to forge ahead to defy the spectre of weakness and reclaim control of my destiny.

"As I was moving forward, victory would be mine, so panic attack or not, I would remain silent and just do what I knew needed to be done".

Nathania Atkinson (2014)

In reflection, I was giving myself terrible advice, but it was the only way I could cope. As I ascended the academic ladder now a master's degree graduate with distinction, earning accolades and opportunities that once seemed out of reach, I found myself grappling with an unsettling emptiness a hollowness that belied the outward trappings of success. The allure of academia beckoned, offering stability and prestige, X3I had become a distant memory I

was no longer the woman I was and the core X3I ladies had moved on. Yet I yearned for more for a vocation that transcended mere job titles and monetary gain.

It was amidst this tumultuous introspection that a revelation dawned a synthesis of my passions, aspirations, and commitment to effecting change. Harnessing the power of creativity, academia, and entrepreneurship, I embarked on a quest to carve out a path uniquely my own, one that would amplify marginalised voices, challenge systemic inequities, and shape a legacy worthy of my father's memory.

With unwavering determination and steadfast resolve, I navigated the labyrinth of academia, culminating in the completion of my dissertation and the attainment of a distinction in Creative Entrepreneurship. A transformation had taken root an evolution from mere survival to the pursuit of a legacy that transcended individual ambitions.

As I stood on the precipice of a new chapter, fuelled by ambition and guided by purpose, I was reminded of a simple truth, a mantra born from the crucible of adversity:

"Once you have ambition, you will survive."

Nathania Atkinson (2015)

But now, survival is no longer enough, it is the legacy that beckons, the imperative to honour the past, shape the present, and inspire the future. And in this pursuit, I find my purpose, the driving force that propels me forward, towards a destiny defined not by circumstance, but by the indomitable spirit that resides within.





Image 57-59: Family at my dad's funeral



Image 60: My dad's headstone with the black fist and Africa as he wore them around his neck

*"If dem want to win the revolution
Must win it, wit rasta!
Can't win no other way*

*Because if you win other way, you go fight again
If Rasta win, den no more war"*

Bob Marley- Rastaman Chant

Live (1973) 

Link to the mini-documentary: Here you can find the documentary that discusses this section in more detail.  <https://youtu.be/tcvT4S3vXSg?feature=shared>

The Mask of Composure: Inner Struggles, Loss, and a Promise of Resilience

*It's just another night
Just another fight for my life
It's all right because everything dies
Nobody knows why
Wetin I go do?
"Wetin you go do when you feeling like you're falling
And you can't find nothing to hold on to?

Memories
Carry me go
Carry me go,
Sick and tired of it all, take me far away*

Burna Boy – Alone (2022) 

The aftermath of laying my father to rest catapulted me into an unrelenting crucible of loss, loneliness, and anger. Stripped of his presence, I found myself insecure in a world rendered suddenly hostile. Well-meaning intrusions, rather than offering solace, heightened my sense of vulnerability, a textbook example of how Black women's interiority is often overlooked or misunderstood (Collins, 2000). Anger became both shield and weapon, its edge blunted only by the grounding presence of my daughter, a reminder of my intergenerational obligations and embodied connection to lineage.

Panic attacks, once dormant since a childhood marked by witnessing extreme violence, erupted with renewed force. At nine, I saw a man murdered, my silent, breathless aftermath echoing through subsequent decades as chronic hypervigilance and withdrawal. Each act of

violence, each loss, compounded this embodied trauma, as described in the literature of diasporic survivorship (Caruth, 1996; Dancy et al., 2018). My personality, once animated, became eclipsed by the adaptive detachment required for survival.

Music, formerly a sacred connective tissue between my father and me, transformed into a painful trigger. Its melodies, once healing, became sonic reminders of absence and rupture, aligning with my assertion that creative practice holds the dual potential for both healing and re-traumatisation when dislocated from community and support.

As a single Black mother, the relentless burden of responsibility demonstrates TDBFE's analysis of Black womanhood at the intersection of structural precarity and familial expectation (Alexander, 2012). Professional setbacks, financial collapse, and the forced return to my family home exposed the persistent precarity underlying even the most determined attempts at upward mobility. The home, now devoid of my father's presence, became a site of both refuge and profound alienation, underscoring the spatial and psychic dislocation central to diasporic Black feminist epistemology.

Seeking solace, I travelled to Jamaica, Europe, Japan, and Africa, only to find that loss migrates with the body, shadowing every attempt at renewal. This reflects my assertion through the use of DEP that diasporic mobility is always entangled with histories of trauma, kinship, and longing.

Each new tragedy intensified the crucible, yet did not extinguish my resolve. In the end, it is the praxis of survival, embodied, intergenerational, and creative, that becomes resistance itself. TDBFE demands that we situate personal pain within collective struggle and theory, refusing isolation in favour of a connected, transnational analysis of Black female endurance. Though the road ahead remains uncertain, I move forward with my daughter, weathering storms, knowing that our resilience is both inheritance and insurgency.

*Who do I turn to when I need saving?
Cause you moved mountains, I can't do the same
Did you think 'bout that when you left us?
I know it's selfish, but I can't help it*

Interlude STORMZY – Black Panther 

Bereavement Again.

Diary entry – 01/04/2020

April has always been a threshold month for me, a season of renewal, a riot of colour and light, and a time of profound personal significance. The world comes alive with spring's arrival, and so too do memories of shared birthdays with my father and the echo of family gatherings, laughter, and belonging. For years, April symbolised possibility, continuity, and celebration.

Yet since my father's passing, April has become a landscape marked by absence as much as renewal. His birthday, once a day of joy, now arrives heavy with longing, a stark reminder of the irreplaceable void he left behind. Still, in the space where grief and memory converge, I find myself drawn to honour his legacy: the lessons of resilience, the quiet strength, and the enduring love he imparted.

This April, that sense of loss deepens with the passing of my beloved Aunt Jennifer. Her presence was a constant source of warmth and wisdom, her absence now a wound complicated by the isolating realities of a pandemic that denies us the solace of collective mourning. In forced solitude, we carry our grief alone, yearning for the healing power of shared remembrance and communal embrace.

And yet, there is comfort in believing Aunt Jennifer rests in peace, reunited with those who went before her. Her spirit persists, a quiet guide, a reservoir of inspiration, woven into the very fabric of my becoming. As I traverse this month of remembrance, I am compelled to reflect on the enduring force of love and the resilience that loss demands of us.

Even as I carry the weight of sorrow, I am steadfast in my commitment to honour the legacies of those who shaped me. Their lives call me to move with intention, to cherish every fleeting moment, and to draw strength from the love that outlives absence. In their memory, I choose to walk forward, purposeful, grateful, and guided always by the enduring light they left behind.



Image 61: My Dad, Aunty Jennifer, and My Mum



Image 62: My Mum, My Nan, My sister, My Aunty Adassa, Centre, Aunty Jennifer

Lack of stability

Diary entry 19/05/2020

It is profoundly disorienting to return, yet again, to a place of uncertainty, a terrain I thought I had outgrown through relentless effort and sacrifice. After years of hard work, ambition, and resilience, facing the same unresolved challenges is both infuriating and demoralising. The recurring instability forces me to interrogate every decision, to question how, despite my best efforts, I am still negotiating the edges of survival.

Life continues to deliver setbacks that defy logic or fairness. Inconsistent income and precarious housing are not just logistical burdens; they erode my foundations of self-worth

and compound the mental and emotional toll it is having on me. The cumulative weight of instability is manifesting in anxiety, exhaustion, and a constant struggle to maintain equilibrium as a parent, scholar, and individual.

Standing at this crossroads, the path ahead feels uncharted and unforgiving. Yet within this discomfort is an urgent call to reassess priorities: my daughter's needs and our basic security must come first. The instinct for self-reliance is powerful, but I am learning, out of necessity if not desire, that seeking support is not weakness. Accessing therapy, community resources, and the solidarity of those who understand these struggles is essential to lighten the load.

There is no shame in vulnerability, nor in admitting the magnitude of this struggle. Small, consistent steps towards stability, securing housing, tending to my mental health, are themselves acts of resistance and love. I remind myself that resilience is not the absence of struggle but the refusal to surrender to it.

I owe it to myself and my daughter to persist, to draw on the reservoirs of strength that have carried us before. The road is uncertain, the obstacles real, but I will not abandon hope or purpose. One step, one day at a time, I am forging a future, even through the fog of uncertainty.

In Private

In this excerpt from my autoethnography, I interrogate the intricate tension between outward composure and internal upheaval. Beneath a façade of stability, I have waged a silent, relentless battle against anxiety, a struggle that has left indelible marks on my emotional well-being.

My cousin's observation exposed the dissonance between public perception and private reality, amplifying my awareness of how anxiety operates in isolation. Solitude became both refuge and prison; I withdrew from social spaces, my energy depleted by the effort to maintain appearances, while negative self-talk and persistent self-doubt undermined moments of connection and belonging.

Despite maintaining a semblance of sociability, only a trusted few glimpsed the depth of my vulnerability. The solitude of my internal battles intensified as loss and betrayal reshaped my closest bonds, leaving me to confront grief and disillusionment largely alone.

Yet, within adversity, a fierce resolve began to crystallise. Anchored by promises made to my father, I cultivated a tenacity to forge a path that transcended hardship. The realisation

that “Everybody can’t come” and “No one is coming to save me” solidified an ethic of radical self-reliance and hyper-independence.

In continuing to navigate this complex inner terrain, I confront the paradox of projecting strength while inhabiting vulnerability. Through rigorous introspection and self-awareness, I strived to reconcile my external poise with the hidden struggles that ultimately shape my journey of growth and resistance.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has critically explored the emotional terrain of grief, the quest for stability and healing, and the resilience shaped by adversity. By situating a deeply personal narrative within broader cultural and spiritual frameworks, I have illuminated how loss catalyses transformation and how the legacies of love and remembrance endure.

Drawing on African and collectivist epistemologies, interconnectedness, with people (living and deceased), social and ecological contexts, and spiritual powers, emerges as foundational to meaning-making (Baloyi & Mokobe-Rabothata, 2014; Delle Fave & Soosai Nathan, 2014; Harrell, 2018; Nwoye, 2017; Ogbonnaya, 1994; Selvam, 2013, 2015; Selvam & Collicutt, 2013; Urata, 2015; Wang, Wong, & Yeh, 2016; Warren & Donaldson, 2018). This chapter demonstrates how the spiritual dimensions of music become conduits for transcendence, facilitating connections that shape identity and collective healing.

The analysis foregrounds music’s intergenerational impact in forging familial bonds, belonging, and social identity, showing how shared musical experiences foster interpersonal connections, group cohesion, and cultural continuity. The chapter addresses the influence of Hip Hop culture on Black girls, women, and mothers, and how they, as creative entrepreneurial agents, reimagine and redefine musical and social spaces. However, these influences extend beyond Hip Hop to include Reggae, Roots and Culture, and 80s Soul, all of which reflect embedded cultural meaning systems, providing norms and values for perception, communication, and behaviour (Triandis, 1996).

Literature such as Peretti (2009) underscores music’s historical significance in Black life, tracing its roots to the era of slavery when spirituals conveyed covert messages, rhythm was embodied, and acapella forms emerged in the absence of instruments. These traditions persist as powerful sites of resistance and meaning-making.

Ultimately, this chapter advances a nuanced understanding of the intersections between grief, spirituality, music, and Black female creativity. It foregrounds how creative practice,

informed by DEP and TDBFE, becomes a means of individual and collective empowerment. Through this lens, the ongoing struggle for healing and transformation is reframed not only as survival but as the courageous, continual reinvention of self, community, and legacy.

Adversity and Transformation

Amidst the turmoil of loss, this autoethnographic chapter traces the emergence of resilience from profound grief and disorientation. Aldrich and Meyer (2015) define resilience as the capacity to confront and adapt to negative pressures and crises, emphasising its aspirational and agentic qualities. Bravery, in this context, is enacted through challenging prevailing norms and confronting adversity directly, an ethos embodied in my father's unwavering commitment to his legal practice despite persistent structural and societal challenges.

The founding of Atkinson Spence Solicitors stands as a testament to Black excellence and community upliftment. My father's leadership created a professional space that fostered inclusivity, representation, and empowerment, offering avenues for both career development and financial stability within the Black community. Growing up within this legal environment under his mentorship, I absorbed not only a meticulous professional discipline but also a deep sense of social responsibility and collective advancement. The firm's commitment to diversity and inclusive practice transcended conventional legal norms, nurturing a supportive ecosystem for emerging Black professionals and laying the groundwork for innovative, community-rooted entrepreneurship.

Yet, the narrative also confronts the entrenched systemic racism pervading legal and financial institutions, exemplified by the unfounded legal accusations and bankruptcy proceedings my father endured. As Alexander (2012) and Carbado & Gulati (2013) illustrate, racialised bias within these systems systematically undermines Black professionals, with devastating consequences for both their careers and personal lives. My father's resilience, persisting in advocacy against racism at immense personal cost, reflects broader patterns within Black communities, where familial solidarity and collective resistance are vital forms of survival (Bell, 2020). This intersection of familial bonds and systemic oppression exposes the enduring psychological toll of racial injustice, shaping identity, well-being, and intra-family dynamics (Dancy et al., 2018).

This chapter, therefore, offers critical insights into the nexus of race, power, and resilience, dynamics that directly inform my trajectory toward entrepreneurship and ongoing negotiation of mobility and agency. Framed through DEP and TDBFE, this narrative advances a nuanced understanding of how Black families confront, resist, and creatively reimagine their

futures within and against oppressive systems. Through personal reflection, it foregrounds the necessity of bravery, advocacy, and collective action in contesting structural barriers and effecting transformative change.

Becoming Miss Nathania

Themes: Black women, Bereavement, Spiritualities and geographies, Academia, Mental Health

“The world is full of painful stories. Sometimes it seems as though there aren't any other kind and yet I found myself thinking how beautiful that glint of water was through the trees.”

Octavia Butler Parable of the Sower (1993)

When Sorrow Silences: The Toll of Collective Grief on Personal Healing

Henri Nouwen (1996) posits that true love endures beyond death, with loved ones living on as real presences. While comforting, internalising this belief is a slow and arduous journey. As I revise this chapter, marking the tenth anniversary of my father's passing, I feel his absence deeply at every milestone. His absence is a visceral ache during moments when I seek his wisdom.

This reflection recalls an informal conversation with another BFCEM who, after losing her father and partner, shared:

“Love isn't the airy-fairy ideal we see in Hollywood. It's how we see ourselves, how we treat and are treated by others. Love is power, it can heal or cut; it is restorative, rejuvenating, reflective; it is a revival.” (BFCEM, London, 44)

Within the frameworks of DEP and TDBFE, these lived conversations exemplify how Black women's spiritual, emotional, and creative practices form critical knowledge systems. My personal grief is not isolated, but a diasporic embodiment of collective trauma, resilience, and survival strategies that DEP employs.

The past decade saw the loss of an entire generation within my family, eight paternal aunts and uncles, and younger cousins, deaths that were sudden and cumulative. The interconnectedness of our familial bonds made each loss feel like a collective fracture. Studies highlight how cumulative grief can erode physical and emotional health, leading to “bereavement overload” (Lobb et al., 2010; APA, 2020).

One participant in the photo-ethnographic phase echoed this deeply:

"Love is the support system of family, friends, and even outsiders. It is emotional, mental, and financial security. When those elements are in order, I feel free, happy, and able to give love." (BFCEM, 35, Birmingham)

DEP and TDBFE remind us that these reflections on family, love, and loss are not just emotional experiences but crucial epistemological sites where diasporic Black womanhood is theorised and reimagined. Loss itself becomes an embodied praxis of resistance and redefinition.

Between Grief and Expectations: The Silent Struggle of Black Women

In the early months of grief, sleep was my only escape. Each morning brought renewed panic, numbness, and despair. I trusted no one and felt dangerously unprotected. Black women are often socialised to embody strength, leaving little room for vulnerability, even in grief (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019; Jerald et al., 2017). This expectation intensifies isolation and exacerbates anxiety (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2020).

Through the lens of TDBFE, these cultural expectations must be understood as transatlantic patterns, where Black British, Caribbean, and African American women are expected to perform resilience at the cost of their emotional survival. Within DEP, my own suppressed mourning is a form of bodily knowledge, highlighting how Black women's pain is both socially produced and politically erased.

Black trauma, death, and grief have been normalised, but the silent, personal aftermath remains under-theorised (Hardy, 2019; Stevenson, 2014). Amidst profound grief, Black women are pressured to move forward rapidly (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Romero, 2000), masking pain to ensure Black survival (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2019).

This societal pressure exacerbates anxiety (Hunn & Craig, 2009; Woods-Giscombe, 2010) and emotional suppression (West et al., 2016; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). DEP provides a necessary intervention, affirming that grieving bodies are not failures of resilience but acts of testimony to the complex realities of diasporic Black existence.

Despite this turmoil, what I received from some family members were dismissive comments:

"You need to get a real job now!"

"What's the point in all this studying?"

"Sort yourself out, get a proper job."

"I don't know what she's doing."

Their comments reflect broader transatlantic capitalist ideologies that prioritise labour and productivity over healing and spiritual continuity, an ongoing struggle Black women face across diasporic sites, as explored through TDBFE.

Disillusioned, I withdrew inward. Yet through DEP, I now understand that this retreat was not simply isolation, but a reorientation, an embodied praxis of survival, mourning, and future rebuilding.

Rooted in Faith: Black Spirituality and the Search for Higher Purpose

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28 NKJV

The concept of spiritual awakening is deeply embedded in Black cultural experience, historically mediated through the sanctuary of the Black church. Black spirituality has long intertwined collective suffering, resilience, and hope, often expressed communally through worship and prayer (Black, 1999; Witherspoon, 2008). Scholars such as Dantley (2003), Dillard (2006), and Milner (2006) have critically situated the Black church as a central site where spirituality and identity are forged against the backdrop of systemic oppression.

My spiritual narrative, unfolding during this transformative period, draws upon and extends these traditions. As Pargament (1997) notes, faith in God has often served as a vital coping mechanism, offering not only survival but meaning-making amidst hardship. Similarly, Black feminist theologians like Cannon (1989) and Gilkes (1994) have illuminated how Black women's religious practices create alternative epistemologies of healing, relationality, and agency.

In my journey, the concept of "God's Plan" became a living praxis, a diasporic embodiment of hope that transcended survival. Conversations with fellow BFCEMS echoed this theology of resilience:

"God must be in the mix. I must do the work, but He gives me strength to strive."

(BFCEM, Birmingham, 33)

"Without God, I would not have been able to move forward."

(BFCEM, Birmingham, 35)

These affirmations reinforce Black's (1999) assertion that prayer, far from being merely ritualistic, constitutes an active force within Black diasporic histories of struggle and perseverance.

Yet my evolving spiritual practice diverged from traditional pragmatic prayer practices, scholars like Gilkes (1994) associated with material survival. Instead, my prayers sought alignment with purpose, healing, and creative calling, an inward, existential form of seeking. As one BFCEM shared:

"Even when physically alone, praying reminds me there's a greater being with positive plans for me. My duty is to push forward."

(BFCEM, London, 45)

This shift mirrors broader transformations in Black spirituality, where traditional collective practices are increasingly interwoven with personal, introspective modes of connection, often shaped by contemporary cultural influences such as Hip Hop's founding principles of knowledge, entrepreneurialism, and holistic well-being (Tucker, 2020). This trajectory was explored in earlier autoethnographic chapters (*The Last Dance, I Am My Father's Daughter, Rhythms of Resistance*), illustrating how music, spirituality, and diasporic identity converge.

While Cannon (1989) emphasised the vocal and communal nature of traditional Black prayer, my expressions increasingly took the form of written reflections, poetry, meditation, songwriting, and visualisation. This hybridisation of spiritual practice aligns with Dancy, Edwards, and Davis' (2020) observations on contemporary Black spirituality blending inherited traditions with emergent, self-directed forms of expression.

Through the lens of DEP and TDBFE, my spiritual evolution is not merely personal testimony; it is a critical intervention that extends Black feminist and theological thought. My lived practices represent a diasporic, creative reimagining of how Black women enact spirituality, not only to survive, but to theorise, to heal, and to innovate new modes of being.

This approach insists that contemporary expressions of Black spirituality must be understood as acts of intellectual labour and cultural production, producing new epistemologies rooted in the embodied experiences of diasporic Black women across transatlantic spaces.

*Say, God will do what he said he will do
He will stand by his word, and he will come through (yeah)*

*God will do what he said he will do
He will stand by his word; he will come through*

*Oh, I won't be afraid of the arrow by day
From the hand of my enemy
I can stand my ground with the Lord on my side
For the snares they have set will not succeed*

Fred Hammond – No Weapon (1996) 

The Big Chop: Shedding Layers of Identity and Embracing Spiritual Rebirth

Is your hair still political? tell me when it starts to burn. ‘

Audre Lorde (1986)



Image 63: Me after the Big Chop

A- *“Come on do it”*

B- *“I am not doing this”*

A- *“What is the F**king big deal just cut it”*

B- *“You are going to wake up tomorrow and feel stupid”*

A- *“Just cut this S**t off my head or I will do it myself.”*

(Takes scissors and cuts hair)

The "Big Chop" in Black women's hair journeys represents far more than a physical transformation, it signifies a profound act of self-reclamation and empowerment. Traditionally, it involves cutting chemically straightened hair to embrace natural textures, challenging Eurocentric beauty standards and affirming the beauty of Blackness (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Banks, 2000; Foluke, 2022).

For me, however, the Big Chop was not merely political but spiritual, an embodied rebirth akin to Angela Bassett's cathartic moment in *Waiting to Exhale* (1996). As Audre Lorde reflected on the political implications of her own dreadlocks (Lorde, 2009), my understanding of hair politics had been shaped early by observing my Rastafarian father and uncles. Their locs symbolised more than style; they marked a radical refusal of dominant aesthetics, histories, economies, and ideologies.

In this pivotal moment, scissors in hand, I cut away not just hair, but the remnants of an identity no longer aligned with my spirit. My long, Jamaican Indian textured hair, once a marker of beauty, fell to the floor, each snip severing attachments to societal expectations of femininity. As Callier and Pérez (2014) argue, hair is a site of identity performance; cutting mine enacted a deliberate renegotiation of how I would be seen, and how I would see myself.

The Big Chop also marked preparation for a larger pilgrimage: my solo journey to Ghana. This trip, nearly a month long, would become a profound emotional, spiritual, and symbolic rebirth. Ghana, long rooted in my consciousness through Rastafarian and Pan-African teachings, called to me at a time when I felt lost and overwhelmed. The legacy of Marcus Garvey, Jamaican-born activist and Pan-African visionary, loomed large, as his teachings on liberation, unity, and return to Africa were central to my upbringing (Adi, 2018; Taylor, 2002; Martin, 1983).

Ghana offered both spiritual revitalisation and confrontation. While I found profound beauty in the land, the sea, and the vibrancy of village life, I also faced harsh realities: the persistence of colourism and classism. Colonial residues remained visible, from the valorisation of lighter skin (Adiku & Darkwah, 2021; Blay, 2011) to the omnipresent image of "White Jesus" in churches, a vivid reminder of European colonialism's enduring impact on African spirituality and identity (hooks, 1992).

Interestingly, my darkened skin from the Ghanaian sun allowed me to blend seamlessly with the villagers, earning a warm sense of belonging. Yet this very acceptance underscored the painful stratifications present in broader society. Lighter-skinned individuals received preferential treatment, revealing the global entrenchment of colonial hierarchies even within postcolonial spaces.

Ultimately, my experience in Ghana reaffirmed the deep interconnectedness of race, class, spirituality, and diasporic identity. The Big Chop was not just a physical shedding but a spiritual activation, an embodied commitment to living more authentically, politically, and consciously across multiple geographies. It illuminated how diasporic journeys, like the Big Chop itself, are never singular: they are layered acts of remembering, resisting, and remaking the self.

Building upon this embodied diasporic praxis, the next phase of my journey explores how spiritual resilience, reclaimed identity, and transnational consciousness converged to inform the emergence of my creative entrepreneurial vision, shaped not only by survival but by a deliberate commitment to reimagining mobility, positionality, and power within transatlantic creative spaces.

Through the lens of DEP and TDBFE, my Big Chop and pilgrimage to Ghana emerge as more than personal milestones; they constitute acts of diasporic theorising through the body. DEP frames these embodied decisions, cutting my hair, journeying to ancestral lands, confronting colonial residues, as praxis: living performances of resistance, reclamation, and redefinition across transatlantic geographies. Simultaneously, TDBFE situates these experiences within a broader epistemological tradition, where Black women's emotional, spiritual, and physical journeys generate new ways of knowing and being. In this way, the Big Chop and the diasporic return are read not simply as symbolic gestures but as critical interventions that expand Black feminist thought, demonstrating how diasporic identity, spirituality, and entrepreneurial consciousness are actively negotiated and reimagined through embodied, transnational experiences.



Right to Left image 64-66: Accra Market, School Girls, Kokrobite Beach



Left to Right image 67-69: Ghana Home, Local women, High Street



Left to Right image 70-72: Local shopping area

Despite my anticipation, I did not experience the sense of belonging in Ghana that I had felt in the Caribbean or even in Cape Verde. Instead, a persistent feeling of displacement emerged, starkly contrasting the homecoming I had envisioned. This dissonance echoed Stuart Hall's reflections on the trauma of Black Caribbean identity in the aftermath of the European encounter, where cultural identity is shaped by both "being" and "becoming" (Hall, 1990).

As a second-generation Black British woman of Jamaican heritage and African descent, I had expected a seamless connection. Yet Ghana revealed the complexities of my diasporic identity: simultaneously affirmed and challenged. Hall's work offered a critical lens for this experience, underscoring that identity is not fixed but continuously negotiated through historical, cultural, and personal forces. My encounter in Ghana illuminated how my sense of self, though rooted in African ancestry, has been profoundly reconfigured by the transatlantic

diasporic journey (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993). Rather than diminishing the significance of the trip, this realisation deepened my commitment to spiritual practice and to trusting the unfolding of the journey. It reaffirmed the "Power of Prayer" (Pargament, 1997; Dillard, 2006) and the necessity of faith in the non-linear, often unexpected evolution of self and belonging. The continent, in all its richness and complexity, remains open to continual exploration, each encounter offering new dimensions to the ever-evolving mosaic of diasporic identity.

"You can look around, you can scan the room, and you can tell who's praying, Praying is part of manifesting, praying is an affirmation, a lot of people who are frustrated in life are those who are not praying, people who are frustrated are more upset that they don't have everything in control. Prayer is super important it is a vital aspect of manifesting. You are programming your subconscious to think a certain way, to feel a certain way every day, you are accepting that you are abundant even if you don't have the things you want, you have the things you need to get to where you want".

Joey Badass (2023)

Black women in academia & Social mobility

Returning to higher education as a visiting lecturer brought a complex mix of emotions. Delivering sessions from my "Invisible Leaders" toolkit, developed during my MA, offered a small but significant sense of joy. For the first time, my family and friends, who had often struggled to grasp the nuances of my creative career, saw my work through a familiar lens: education. With my father no longer here to articulate my creative process to them, they found comfort in the perceived stability of an academic path that aligned with the traditional mantra: "Go to school, get a good job."

Although I knew this role was not my ultimate destination, it provided a valuable starting point, a space to teach, mentor, network, and stabilise my income while continuing to develop my creative practice. Yet my optimism was tempered by the realities of the environment: entrenched whiteness, classism, and patriarchy, often masked by superficial gestures of diversity (Bhopal, 2018; Maseti, 2018).

Recent travels to Ghana and Japan had expanded my worldview, but returning to the UK plunged me back into the structural challenges of being a Black woman in academia. My experience mirrored my earlier time as a student (see *The Last Dance*), where my intersectional identity, young, Black, female, rendered me both visible and alien. The same creative, dynamic identity that secured me the role increasingly marked me as "challenging" within the institution.

One incident stands out. Preparing for a seminar, I entered my usual classroom, only to be confronted by an older white man who, assuming I was a student, angrily ordered me out. Silently, I revealed my staff ID, informing him that he had overstayed his allocated time. His embarrassed retreat was telling, but not unusual.

Such incidents reveal the enduring realities for Black bodies in higher education, where Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts often mask systemic inequalities (Bhopal, 2018; Ahmed, 2012). The symbolic violence of institutional racism, prison-like architecture, and the lack of Black students and staff deepened my sense of creative and physical entrapment (Mirza, 2015; Bhopal, 2020).

Like many young Black women navigating meritocracy and credentialism (Mirza, 1995), I had strategically leveraged education as a pathway to mobility. My teaching style, integrating creative praxis, music, art, documentary, and debate, resonated strongly with students, with 90% expressing satisfaction through grades and surveys. Yet despite this success, a growing internal dissonance remained.

After nearly five years of teaching, and with my hours reduced despite clear achievements, I recognised it was time to move beyond academia, to seek spaces where my creative, entrepreneurial vision could flourish without the persistent weight of institutional constraint.

Conclusion

This chapter reveals the layered complexities Black women face navigating grief, spirituality, diaspora, and academia. The enforced stoicism demanded by the "Strong Black Woman" schema (Castelin & White, 2022; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007) silences authentic emotional expression, deepening isolation and compounding intergenerational trauma (Watson-Singleton et al., 2019). In responding to Research Question 1, this chapter demonstrates how systemic and socio-cultural pressures, including bereavement, racism, spiritual exclusion, and institutional marginalisation, serve as catalysts propelling Black women toward reimagined paths of creative entrepreneurship.

Using DEP and TDBFE, the analysis shows how Black women reframe grief, spirituality, and mobility as acts of resistance and self-renewal. The turn toward introspective spirituality (Dancy et al., 2020) highlights a reclaiming of agency where traditional structures have failed (Pargament, 1997), directly informing strategies for empowerment explored in Research Question 2.

Diasporic encounters, particularly in Ghana, underscore Hall's (1990) and Gilroy's (1993) insights that identity within the diaspora is not fixed but continuously negotiated. Encounters with colourism, colonial residues, and spiritual dissonance reveal the complexities of belonging, illustrating how diasporic BFCEMs navigate transnational socio-political contexts to pursue positionality and mobility.

In academia, the chapter critiques the persistent performative diversity and structural exclusions that marginalise Black women encounter. (Bhopal, 2018; Ahmed, 2012; Mirza, 2015). Despite achieving pedagogical success, the hostile environment necessitated a retreat toward spaces fostering creative freedom, cultural authenticity, and spiritual wholeness, an emerging theme that informs how BFCEMs resist systemic erasure and achieve empowerment.

While Hip Hop culture is not a primary focus here, the broader cultural practices of resilience, reinvention, and creative self-making discussed in this chapter lay critical groundwork for addressing Research Question 3 in subsequent chapters.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that Black women's journeys across grief, diaspora, spirituality, and education are not peripheral but constitute central epistemological contributions. Their embodied experiences offer radical blueprints for reimagining entrepreneurship, socio-political belonging, and systemic transformation across transatlantic spaces.

MUVA HUSTLER

Themes: Creative entrepreneurship, Dance, Black Bodies, Femininity, Financial gain

*“F*ck all these degrees I should be stripping instead”!*

Can't Win for Nothing Symba & Dj Drama (2022) 

Throughout numerous conversations with other BFCEMs, I have encountered recurring reflections, often shared with a mix of laughter, curiosity, and unease, on the advantages afforded to women who confidently leverage their bodies, beauty, and femininity, enhanced or otherwise, for material gain, social access, and upward mobility. These informal discussions often challenged conventional moral frameworks and societal expectations surrounding the ideals of being a “Good Woman” or a “Lady,” exposing the tension between empowerment, agency, and the persistent reality of life as an uphill struggle.

This tension, between embracing femininity as a source of power and navigating societal critique, is deeply rooted in Black feminist thought. Scholars such as hooks (2000) and Collins (2009) have long examined how Black women’s agency is simultaneously celebrated and policed, particularly when it transgresses normative boundaries of respectability. Their work highlights the dual burden faced by Black women who seek to frame their autonomy through embodied self-expression, only to encounter systems that both eroticise and punish them.

More contemporary discussions by Treva Lindsey (2015) and Moya Bailey (2021) further illuminate how Black women strategically negotiate identity and visibility for positionality and survival, even while grappling with the moral and ethical complexities such negotiations entail. These debates underscore how, within a systemically unjust society, Black women’s use of beauty, performance, and self-presentation becomes both a tactic of resilience and a contested terrain.

Framed through DEP and TDBFE, this chapter critically examines how BFCEMs enact and theorise these negotiations across creative, entrepreneurial, and diasporic spaces. By centring both personal autoethnographic reflections and the collective voices of other BFCEMs, the chapter illuminates the ongoing tension between agency, survival, and societal

judgment. It invites a deeper exploration of how Black women creatively and critically reimagine pathways to empowerment within structures that simultaneously desire and discipline their visibility.

Money Moves and Moral Dilemmas: Black Women's Pursuit of Upward Mobility in Complex Spaces.

Told shawty, make it clap (clap)

Shawty, just make it clap

Told her bust it, bust it, bust it, bust it

Bust it, bust it, bust it like a AK

Told her bust it, bust it, Flipmode.

Flipmode- Fabulous, Velous, Chris Brown (2017) 

Working in academia had become increasingly hostile. Internal politics, misogyny, racism, and poor contractual conditions eroded my passion for teaching. What I had envisioned as a progressive step toward upward mobility and positionality, potentially leading to roles at a Caribbean university or HBCU, had instead become a site of entrapment. Disillusioned and underpaid, I recognised it was time to leave.

I needed to feel inspired again. I needed to travel, to create, and to generate the income necessary to change my circumstances. I soon realised I was not alone: many Black women were similarly pursuing financial independence, upward mobility, and positionality, fighting to escape the perpetual cycle of economic instability that often resembled a game of snakes and ladders.

Adopting a multidisciplinary lens, I returned to the creative sector to explore the intersection of power, vulnerability, and entrepreneurship among women operating in informal economies and urban creative industries. I employed primary research methods, including ethnography, diary entries, and immersive observations, committing fully to the lived experiences and day-to-day realities of creative entrepreneurs (Angrosino, 2007).

While my initial aim was pragmatic, inspiration and income, this journey also became an opportunity to critically interrogate the broader SPEC forces shaping our lives. Through

reflexivity, informal conversations, and intellectual critique, I began crafting a new narrative of Black female creative entrepreneurship rooted in agency, resilience, and resistance.

Reflections on Diary Entries (December 2017 – February 2018)

Returning to the creative sector offered immediate financial opportunity but also exposed new ethical tensions. After an informal interview in one of London's prestigious areas, I accepted a role as a performance manager, drawn by the promise of income and industry re-engagement. Yet, I neglected due diligence, prioritising financial survival over aligning with my deeper values. bell hooks (2000) critiques how capitalism ensnares marginalised individuals under the guise of empowerment, a reality I was now living.

As the role materialised, I felt the moral weight of managing women within the adult entertainment sector. Memories surfaced of peers who once took similar paths during university. While feminist scholarship affirms women's right to bodily autonomy (Davis, 1981; hooks, 2000; Nussbaum, 1999; Phipps, 2020), I could not ignore the exploitative systemic pressures, poverty, and societal glorification of hypersexuality that complicated narratives of choice (Bailey, 2010; Morgan, 1999). The predominance of Black women in caregiving roles, such as my own "House Mum" position, echoed Collins' (2000) analysis of communal responsibility and emotional labour.

Navigating this world demanded intense vigilance. Each week, I juggled motherhood and exhausting travel, embodying the overlapping burdens Black women have historically borne (Collins, 2000). Managing the dancers' finances, checking appearances, enforcing rules, and performing emotional triage became part of my new, survivalist rhythm, an exhausting routine that blurred professional and personal boundaries.

Within the club's ecosystem, I encountered stark racial and gender dynamics. Customers' curiosity ("Why are you here?") and assumptions about who belonged reflected persistent stereotypes. My intentional subversion, through plain clothing and restrained styling, challenged the hyper-visibility expected of women in these spaces. This oppositional performance aligned with hooks' (1992) concept of the oppositional gaze: consciously refusing prescribed roles.

Ethnographically, the club became a rich site of inquiry. The women's resilience complicated dominant victimhood narratives. Despite operating within an exploitative capitalist framework, many exhibited profound agency, double lives, and aspirations beyond their current realities.

However, troubling patterns remained. Conversations revealed that while material gains, cars, and luxuries offered fleeting empowerment, systemic exploitation eroded deeper self-worth. Emotional labour became central to my role, as “House Mum” shifted into a form of other-mothering (Collins, 2000). In our improvised fellowship, we navigated collective survival amidst racist and sexist hostility from customers.

Racial dynamics further complicated this space. Black male patrons, often stereotyped and overcharged, faced heightened scrutiny, echoing Kelley (1997) and Gilroy’s (1993) critiques of how Blackness is both commodified and policed. One Black customer lamented the absence of Black dancers and the missing vitality of American Hip Hop culture, revealing both nostalgia and discomfort, as media representations shape and distort expectations of Blackness in diasporic spaces (Morgan, 1999).

Ultimately, this interim chapter laid bare the complexities of survival within informal economies: resilience entangled with exploitation, empowerment complicated by capitalism, and creativity tethered to relentless socio-political constraint.

Critical Reflections on Power, Capitalism, and Female Empowerment in the Strip Club

The strip club operates as a microcosm of broader capitalist and patriarchal structures, where power dynamics extend far beyond dancer-client interactions. Internally, management and legal authorities impose policies ostensibly designed to protect dancers but, as Pilcher (2009) notes, often prioritise shielding the club from liability. This structural exploitation became starkly evident in my role.

Traditional scholarship tends to centre customer-dancer exchanges (Egan, 2005), but the internal hierarchies warrant critical attention. Dancers are subjected to house fees, fines for lateness, and deductions for minor infractions, frequently leaving them with little to no earnings, a direct reflection of capitalist exploitation where marginalised labour is commodified and undervalued (Fraser, 2013; Weeks, 2011).

As a performance manager, I navigated a conflicting ethical terrain. While I sought to minimise financial penalties, the tipping I received in return exposed the complex interplay between survival, complicity, and exploitation within capitalist systems (Harvey, 2005). Even acts of care could inadvertently reinforce structural inequalities.

Conversations with the women revealed varied motivations: many Black and White British dancers supplemented professional careers or funded entrepreneurial ventures; a precarious balancing act symptomatic of neoliberal capitalism’s exploitation of women’s

labour (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Contrary to stereotypes, many were in committed relationships, challenging assumptions about their social isolation and demonstrating a complex negotiation of public and private identities (Dewey & Kelly, 2011).

The presence of dancers from Eastern Europe, Poland, Bosnia, Kosovo, further underscored the global nature of the sex and entertainment industries, highlighting how cross-cultural differences shaped behaviour and power dynamics within the club.

Despite diverse backgrounds, financial urgency unified the women, fuelling intense competition. Their entrepreneurial strategies, branding, promotion, financial management, echoed the “hustler” ethos celebrated in Hip Hop culture (Morgan, 1999; Rose, 1994). Yet, this ethos unfolded within a system that commodified their bodies and labour at significant emotional and physical cost (Egan, 2006; Pasko, 2002).

These reflections prompted the concept of the Transatlantic Diaspora Mobility Index (TDMI): a critical framework for analysing how marginalised women negotiate shifting dynamics of power, positionality, and mobility. While attentive to the realities of BFCEMs, the TDMI transcends any single demographic, illuminating the evolving structural barriers and opportunities shaping diasporic women’s pursuit of economic and social agency within globalised informal economies.

The complexities of the informal creative economy reveal an acute need for conceptual tools capable of mapping how marginalised women, particularly BFCEMs, navigate intersecting terrains of opportunity, precarity, and exploitation. Prevailing frameworks often fail to account for the fluid, non-linear strategies through which diasporic Black women assert power, reposition themselves, and seek upward mobility across transnational spaces. In response, I advance the TDMI as a robust framework and analytical instrument, grounded in DEP and TDBFE. This model critically theorises and traces the dynamic, embodied trajectories of diasporic women, moving beyond the limitations of conventional entrepreneurial or feminist paradigms.

The Hustler’s Stage: Identity, Capitalism, and Emotional Labour in Hip Hop and SEV’s

Look, I don't dance now

I make money moves (ayy, ayy)

Say I don't gotta dance

I make money move

*If I see you and I don't speak
That means I don't fuck with you
I'm a boss, you a worker, bitch
I make bloody moves*

Bodak Yellow – Cardi B (2017) 

Critical Reflections on Power, Capitalism, and Female Empowerment in the Strip Club

The juxtaposition of a formal gentleman's club setting with Hip Hop's musical backdrop underscores the genre's pervasive influence. Songs by Cardi B, Nicki Minaj, and The City Girls frame a new narrative, rising from stripper to superstar, that positions Sex Entertainment Venues (SEVs) as potential pathways to financial independence and upward mobility.

Yet this celebratory narrative is deeply complicated. Scholars critique how Hip Hop reproduces modern-day Jezebel and Sapphire archetypes previously mentioned, reinforcing racialised and gendered stereotypes that strip Black women of agency (Brown et al., 2013; Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2009; Lindsey, 2015). Within SEVs, these stereotypes materialise in the differential treatment of marginalised women, echoing long-standing societal biases.

The concept of the "hustler", central to Hip Hop culture, is also deeply embedded in the strip club economy. Dancers must perform not just physically but emotionally, curating experiences that maximise profit, embodying Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotional labour. Their identities become acts of survival, aligning with Butler's (1990) notion of performativity: repeated acts that sustain precarious economic existence within an exploitative capitalist structure.

Empowerment or Exploitation? Navigating Agency and Capitalism

My experiences as a manager forced a confrontation with the contradictions between empowerment and exploitation. A dancer's early question, "*Are you here to save us?*", captured this tension between perceived agency and structural constraint. My response, "*No, I'm here to ensure your safety and money*", revealed the limits of framing agency purely as choice without acknowledging the coercive forces of capitalism (Fraser, 2013).

One particularly stark moment arose when I denied entry to a young Black girl, alarmed by her idealisation of cosmetic surgery, money, and hypersexualisation. Drawing that moral line

underscores the ethical dilemmas inherent in managing a space that simultaneously empowers and exploits, a tension feminist scholars continue to debate (Bernstein, 2007; Weitzer, 2009).

Strip clubs reveal how agency and exploitation are not binary opposites but deeply entangled. Women working in these spaces demonstrate entrepreneurialism, resilience, and strategic negotiation. Yet their labour remains commodified within a capitalist system that limits the possibilities of empowerment, raising critical questions about the true costs of survival and success under late capitalism.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter critically exposes the layered SPEC environments that BFCEMs navigate, landscapes shaped by systemic racism, capitalism, misogyny, and racialised gender expectations. Through autoethnographic reflection on my experiences as a "House Mum," this analysis reveals the entangled realities of empowerment and exploitation within creative informal economies.

Addressing Research Question 1, the chapter evidences how systemic barriers, economic precarity, racialised beauty hierarchies, and capitalist exploitation serve as catalysts driving Black women toward alternative entrepreneurial pathways. The strip club emerges as a contested site where socio-cultural expectations, agency, and survival collide.

In response to Research Question 2, it demonstrates how BFCEMs navigate positionality and upward mobility through strategic self-branding, emotional labour, and the "hustler" ethos rooted in Hip Hop culture, while contending with constrained transatlantic socio-political terrains.

Engaging Research Question 3, the chapter illustrates how Hip Hop both shapes and complicates entrepreneurial practices and identity formation, valorising resilience and mobility while reinforcing hypersexualised representations that BFCEMs must navigate critically.

By applying DEP and TDBFE, the chapter centres embodied diasporic experiences and lays the foundation for an emerging conceptual tool such as the TDBMI. Functioning as both framework and analytical tool to address, trace and theorise the multi-directional, intergenerational and intersectional movements of Black women across transatlantic spaces, specifically the UK, Caribbean and USA.

Ultimately, this chapter challenges reductive narratives of agency or victimhood, showing BFCEMs as strategic navigators of empowerment and resistance within exploitative structures. As the following chapters reveal, their creative, embodied, and diasporic practices are not merely survival strategies; they are radical blueprints for reimagining power, mobility, and freedom across transatlantic landscapes.

My Own Muse

Themes: Intergenerational entrepreneurship, Social and Economic Mobility and Style,
Fashion and Power

Period: 2020-2024

Pretty naturally, me money stack properly

One top gyal, any other top a back a mi...

One top gyal a couldn't three nor two

Yow from mi get fi break nuh tek nuh break, me working daily

Wah fi rich like really rich, is like mi nah fi check me savings

Gotta truck like what the fuck

Nuh feel mi aguh beg nuh ratings from mi born

Mi never see nuh ratings pon nuh payslip

Naturally, Shaniel Muir (2022) 

Top Gyal Season: Negotiating Selfhood and Challenging Boundaries of Conformity

In recent years, I found myself repeatedly negotiating my identity in response to external projections, narratives that sought to define my worth, behaviour, and role in society. This mirrors the structural constraints Hunter (2005) outlines, wherein Black women must constantly navigate "scripts" of acceptability shaped by racism, sexism, and class hierarchies. These unspoken expectations demand composure, tolerance, and endurance, what Collins (2000) and Crenshaw (1991) identify as survival tactics required for professional and social mobility. Yet, they come at a cost. As Harris-Perry (2011) argues, Black women are often deemed "not enough" in any context, motherhood, creativity, or entrepreneurship, prompting an endless cycle of self-justification.

This period marked a personal rupture and a reclamation: a refusal to internalise limiting narratives. It represented a shift from accommodation to resistance, what hooks (1984) names as a transformative refusal to be defined by systemic subjugation. That reclamation was embodied in February 2020, when I presented my early doctoral research at the

National Association of African American Studies conference in Dallas, Texas. It was a professional milestone and a spiritual homecoming, my first return to the U.S. since my father's passing. Engaging with leading and emerging Black scholars on topics ranging from Hip Hop and Black girlhood to voting rights and education affirmed that I had begun to forge a space for myself on my own terms. As Collins (2000) reminds us, "Black women's ability to carve out safe spaces for self-definition is an act of resistance" (p. 108). In that moment, I was claiming one.

Yet Dallas was no cultural mirror to New York. Its racialised geography made segregation painfully visible. ZIP code shaped not only opportunity but culture. Outside the conference, the only familiar comfort came in a Black neighbourhood where I found catfish, warm conversation, and Dancehall and Hip Hop playing in the background. These spaces, often overlooked, embody what hooks (2009) describes as sites of cultural affirmation, where Black community resists the imposition of white supremacist norms (p. 151).

The next evening, as I prepared for my presentation, news broke of Pop Smoke's death. Though I did not know him personally, his murder struck me deeply. He embodied both the promise and precarity of Black youth and creative entrepreneurship. His death felt like another rupture, a reminder of what Saidiya Hartman (2008) describes as the "violence of the quotidian" that shapes Black life with enduring vulnerability (p. 6). In mourning him, I felt a renewed urgency. The time to claim space, tell our stories, and redefine power was now.



Image 73-74: NAAAS pass Moring of NAAAS presentation 2020

I attempted to shift my energy and played  D smoke's album for the rest of my trip, letting his music serve as a soundtrack to my resolve.

That familiar ache became a catalyst, a kind of superpower I channelled into what would become a powerful and well-received presentation. My confidence surged, my love affair with America was reignited, and I left with a renewed vision: to build a life that honoured both

my researcher's intellect and my creative entrepreneurial spirit. I returned home fuelled by purpose, ready to create spaces where my voice would not only be heard but resound with clarity, power, and intent.

Top Gyal Interrupted: Navigating Professional, Personal and Global Crisis in 2020

I returned from Dallas, Texas, like many others in 2020, believing it would be the year of 20/20 clarity. It was, but not in the way any of us anticipated. Just days after celebrating my daughter's birthday at The Ivy in March, the world shut down. The simultaneous eruption of global racial justice uprisings and the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep structural inequalities. Racial and economic disparities in employment, healthcare, and mobility became impossible to ignore (Patel et al., 2020; Glover et al., 2020). These converging crises marked a collective reckoning, a societal "impasse" that foregrounded longstanding questions of equity, justice, and accountability (Pirtle, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2020).



Image 75-76: At the Ivy for my daughter's birthday with my sister days before the world changed. Navigating the pandemic as a BFCEM and doctoral researcher intensified the intersecting burdens Black women often carry (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). I found myself juggling homeschooling, supporting my daughter through anxiety around exams and isolation, and confronting urgent financial instability. Amid the ongoing fallout of my father's death, I faced housing insecurity, selling one home, being temporarily homeless, and moving into a rental, all while trying to remain emotionally and financially stable. These challenges highlight how the pandemic magnified racialised gender burdens, compounding stress, grief, and economic precarity (Pirtle, 2020; Bowleg, 2020).

Still, I leaned into the cultural practices that have long anchored Black communities: music, food, and familial fellowship. This strategy of communal healing echoes the cultural

resilience frameworks described by hooks (2000) and West et al. (2016), underscoring the necessity of collective care in times of crisis. Yet death returned, I lost my godmother, Aunty Jennifer, and my great uncle, Pastor McCalla, further deepening the grief that underpinned this period.

With creative entrepreneurship on pause, I pivoted. Leveraging my legal and managerial experience alongside research expertise, I secured a remote Head of Policy role with a non-profit formed in response to the racial uprisings. The position offered rare financial stability, but beneath that relief was emotional fatigue. The workplace was emotionally saturated, every conversation racialised, every disagreement highly personal. Although led by minoritised women, the interpersonal dynamics were fraught and, for me, deeply triggering. As Audre Lorde (1984) reminds us, "the personal is political", and unresolved trauma often resurfaces in professional spaces, especially where race, gender, and activism intersect.

After completing my six-month contract, I moved on. Before settling into our new home, my daughter and I spent three days in a hotel, technically homeless, emotionally exhausted, and far from the "Top Gyal" season I had envisioned. And yet, once we moved in, I found something invaluable: sanctuary. bell hooks (1990) describes homeplace as a site of resistance and healing, a space where Black women can "recover and become whole" (p. 42). My new home offered precisely that: stillness, clarity, and recovery.

This experience mirrors the realities of many Black women who straddle caregiving, creativity, survival, and ambition. The constant negotiation of stability in the face of structural neglect is not just a testament to Black women's strength, but, as Collins (2000) asserts, a critique of the very systems that demand such relentless resilience in the first place.



Images 77-81: Family time

*You look at me like I'm unfamiliar
Like I'm brand new, like you
Never knew that you like them thick
Mmm, I've been carrying this weight
And the world beneath this braids
And I'm confused*

*Would you take the pain that came
With all the parts you wanna claim for you?
You want my thighs, you my stride
But not this melanin
You want my hair
But you don't care for this complexion
I'm a black woman*

Black Woman – Danielle Brooks (2019) 

Despite navigating numerous challenges, I remained grateful throughout the pandemic. I secured a second contract, technically a professional step forward, taking on a senior researcher role, but in many ways, it proved more difficult than the first. While the research topics aligned with my interests, I found myself constrained by outdated frameworks and ideological expectations that felt disconnected from the current realities of Black communities, particularly Black men and the criminal justice system. Compounding this discomfort was the fact that the project's founders had known my father, casting a quiet pressure over my presence.

Still, the role offered remote work, a higher salary, and short-term stability, privileges during a time of global crisis. I reminded myself, as Philippians 4:6 offers, “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...*” Yet as the contract progressed, I found myself confronting a familiar internal reckoning: was the pay worth the intellectual and emotional dissonance?

Once again, I felt far removed from the creative research fusion that once ignited my passion. Instead, I was caught in a recurring loop, accepting roles out of financial necessity, as described in the autoethnographic chapter “Muva Hustler.” This cycle reflects a broader reality for many Black women. As Crenshaw (1989) articulates, intersectionality reveals how race, gender, and class converge to constrain agency, often pushing Black women into labour that clashes with their aspirations and identities.

The resentment of having to trade purpose for survival intensified. Each morning, panic attacks signalled my body's rebellion against work that drained my spirit. I was stuck, resentful of money, yet dependent on it, working in an environment that undermined my well-being.

Lorde (1984) names this reality with clarity: Black women, in pursuit of survival under capitalism, often "scrape together a living in ways that exhaust the spirit and diminish the soul" (p. 55). That exhaustion was real. And while I had learned to perform strength, I knew this pattern could no longer define my journey.

It became clear that financial stability could no longer justify sacrificing my purpose, peace, or voice. I needed to return to work that aligned with my values, work that reflected the creative and academic synthesis I was committed to building. In this turning point, I echoed the call of Collins (2000), who asserts that Black women's empowerment lies not only in challenging oppressive structures but in reclaiming the right to dream freely, to live fully, and to pursue purpose without compromise.

Freedom to Flourish: Balancing Career Aspirations and Authentic Identity in Black Womanhood

*"Summertime but it feels cold
Sun's out, it ain't shinin' though
I'm just tryna make it through the day
Ain't thinkin' 'bout tomorrow
As I lay me down to sleep
I pray to Lord my soul to keep
'Cause there's darkness all around me

Told my brother we gon' slide
We gon' ride
'Til the wheels fall off, we gon' ride"*

Till the wheels fall off, Chris Brown, (2022) 

The third attempt at employment offered what appeared to be an ideal role: a senior research manager position, higher pay, and a seemingly values-aligned organisation where I hoped to rebuild my creative entrepreneurial business alongside. But this role quickly became the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. What unfolded was a cycle of microaggressions, passive-aggressive behaviour, and deep feelings of being undervalued and out of place. I endured backstabbing, dishonesty, and a toxic undercurrent of immaturity. Although not everyone contributed to this environment, the cumulative toll on my mental

health was undeniable. I stayed, initially, out of obligation and hope, but the cost became too high.

Over time, I grew hyper-aware of how I spoke, dressed, and carried myself. I dimmed my light to avoid triggering others' insecurities. I modified my presence to survive. This form of racialised and gendered code-switching, deeply analysed by Hunter (2005) and Collins (2000), exemplifies how Black women are policed into silence, pressured to conform to unspoken expectations rooted in the “Angry” or “Aggressive Black Woman” stereotype. This pattern of forced adaptability reflects what Crenshaw (1991) terms “intersectional burden,” where multiple oppressions converge to shape everyday interactions and institutional encounters.

Through the lens of DEP, this period highlights how stress, silence, and over-performance are internalised physically and spiritually. I sacrificed emotional, spiritual, and physical health in exchange for professional “stability.” The toll was profound. Griffith, Neighbours & Johnson (2009) and Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) show how Black women disproportionately suffer from high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and emotional distress, conditions I witnessed take lives in my own family, and which manifested in me through panic attacks and burnout.

I finally reached a breaking point. Though the money was attractive, I chose integrity over salary. My values could no longer be compromised by environments that refused to accommodate my full humanity. We agreed to transition my role into a freelance consultancy, allowing both professional boundaries and personal healing. What felt like an ending became an unexpected opening.

In this new space, I discovered not just income, but alignment. I began securing additional contracts, particularly within documentary and music, which reignited the creative-research synergy at the heart of my work. This phase reflected a return to TDBFE principles: centring my diasporic voice, asserting self-definition, and operating within interdisciplinary creative economies that are grounded in Black women’s lived realities and political consciousness.

Crucially, I joined a team of young, Black, God-fearing professionals who created a refuge, what hooks (1990) and Collins (2000) describe as a “safe space” for Black women’s autonomy and self-actualisation. It became a home for fellowship, growth, and vision. At first, integration proved challenging. As a “lone wolf,” I struggled with the dynamics of collective collaboration and positionality. Our first attempt faltered, but when we reunited, we reimagined our working relationship. I was offered the autonomy to function as a senior consultant, allowing my creative and entrepreneurial pursuits to flourish in tandem with meaningful research.

This transformative experience reflects DEP’s emphasis on embodied, relational knowledge production and TDBFE call for transatlantic collaboration rooted in Black feminist values. In contrast to past workspaces where I had to dilute or disguise my identity, this role affirmed my multidimensional self, as a mother, scholar, artist, and strategist. The respect and trust I received softened the hyper-independence I had been conditioned to uphold and reminded me that interdependence is not weakness, but a radical form of survival and power.

Death Strikes Again



Image 82-84 Duane, Me Blaine and Duane, Family

Then, in October 2023, death struck again. My younger twin cousin passed unexpectedly, devastating our entire family and the Israelite community he and his brother had so lovingly built. The loss shattered us, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally. We are still grappling with the magnitude of his absence. In the face of unspeakable grief, I returned to the tenets of

DEP care, community, memory, and embodiment. Collectively, family and community poured love into those he left behind, his children, his partner, his brother, our cousins, grasping tightly to the diasporic kinship that sustains us.

Through TDBFE, this moment becomes more than personal mourning. It becomes again a part of a transatlantic legacy of grief, survival, and spiritual fortitude, an urgent reminder that our losses, like our labour, are political. And that Black women's healing is neither a luxury nor an afterthought. It is the foundation of future-making.

Creative Entrepreneurship

*“Man this cold world could be so vicious
Put your hands together and pray with us
Need to see my family more
So busy that they probably think that I don't love 'em
Probably telling people I forgot about my cousins
He's gone to Hollywood now, man so fuck him”*

Dreams, Krept and Konan ft Ed Shereen (2015) 

Building Pathways: Integrating Creative Praxis, Research, and Strategic Vision for Black Female Entrepreneurship

My professional journey began to exemplify the seamless integration of creative practice, research, and strategic vision within the framework of Black female creative entrepreneurship. Everything to date and what was happening in this moment, including creative practice in bringing research, music and documentary together, utilising research and strategy to support creatives in business, collaborating and designing creative outputs in research spaces, carved out a unique space where I can exist authentically while remaining committed to empowering Black girls, women and mothers' voices in every space I am in. Each milestone reinforces my purpose of creating spaces that reflect and celebrate Black female resilience, identity, and intergenerational strength through innovative, culturally rooted pathways.

Building Pathways: Integrating Creative Praxis, Research, and Strategic Vision for Black Female Entrepreneurship

My professional journey increasingly exemplifies the dynamic integration of creative praxis, research, and strategic vision within the evolving field of Black female creative entrepreneurship. Each experience to date, from blending research, music, and documentary to designing strategic interventions for creative businesses, has reinforced my commitment to occupying spaces authentically while amplifying the voices of Black girls, women, and mothers. These milestones, rooted in DEP and aligned with TDBFE, reflect a deep dedication to cultivating culturally grounded pathways that centre Black female resilience, identity, and intergenerational strength.

As I continue to develop a space where creative practice, research, and strategic consultancy intersect, I have refined a distinctly applied transdisciplinary approach, one informed directly by the critical insights of my PhD research. This approach not only challenges siloed knowledge production but also embodies a future-facing model of Black creative entrepreneurship as a vehicle for socio-economic transformation.

During this period, I expanded my strategic leadership as Chief Strategy Officer for an international company operating across the USA, UK, and Japan. I spearheaded initiatives that revitalised and diversified the company's portfolio, particularly by expanding from Web3 ventures into in-real-life (IRL) products, events, and experiences. This role demonstrated my ability to anticipate and shape the diversification of creativity, foster strategic partnerships, and create sustainable infrastructures, hallmarks of creative resilience and forward-thinking leadership.

Simultaneously, my research consultancy grew through ongoing collaboration with my research "family," where I leveraged interdisciplinary and innovative methods to engage underrepresented creative communities. My commitment to impactful storytelling, anchored in culturally relevant, participatory research practices, allowed me to translate complex findings into accessible narratives that resonate across diverse audiences, reinforcing the imperative to democratise knowledge production.

In parallel, my role as a Cultural and Creative Senior Consultant further advanced Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives within the creative industries. Through contributions to documentaries, artist development programmes, and strategic research projects, I continued to foreground transformative narratives that challenge dominant paradigms and amplify underrepresented voices. These projects not only embody the applied ethos of DEP but also contribute to broader movements for structural change within transatlantic creative and cultural economies.

Ultimately, this phase of my journey consolidates a critical praxis: one where creativity, research, and strategic innovation are not siloed pursuits, but interdependent practices deeply rooted in Black feminist epistemologies and dedicated to reimagining possibilities for Black women's entrepreneurship, leadership, and cultural sovereignty.

The documentaries included:

 Windrush: in partnership with Rush Theatre Company and the Arts Council:

<https://youtu.be/yBumsntA6YM>

 And 6 part Legacy documentary on Birmingham Grime:

<https://youtu.be/ygjwVV13www?feature=shared>

Entrepreneurship in Lockdown: Transforming Challenges into Intergenerational Bonds

The original writing of this chapter was distinctive because it unfolded in real time, capturing an ongoing journey rather than a completed narrative. It demonstrated that upward mobility was possible for Black women who are mothers, creatives, and entrepreneurs, although not without considerable obstacles. Throughout this journey, my daughter and I, despite our different ages and stages, encountered environments hostile to our core principles of freedom, vision, and authentic support. These mirrored experiences catalysed the creation of the SPEAK No Handbook Journal and initiated an intergenerational business for my daughter.

SPEAK was envisioned as a multi-generational text, offering mothers and their teen daughters a safe space to navigate motherhood, girlhood, and the transition into womanhood without judgment. This initiative aligns with the concept of intergenerational entrepreneurship, where ventures are not only inherited but co-created across generations (Zellweger et al., 2011; Nordqvist & Melin, 2010). Rooted in the TDBFE developed through this thesis, SPEAK also reflects DEP's emphasis on lived, embodied knowledge and critical reflexivity across generational lines.

Emerging at the beginning of the first lockdown, a moment of global uncertainty, SPEAK arose from the urgent need to prioritise family relationships and emotional well-being. My daughter and I began intentionally reworking how we communicated, listening and speaking in ways that fostered growth rather than conflict. These dialogues became foundational to the SPEAK project, reflecting the SPEC issues that Black women and girls must navigate daily.

Reflecting on shared experiences highlighted the joy, healing, discomfort, and lessons embedded in our relationship. Capturing these memories in a tangible product supported the creation of intentional, affirming spaces, a practice that Collins (2000) and Lindsey (2015) argue is essential for resilience and empowerment among Black communities.

Lockdown also prompted a critical reassessment of my entrepreneurial goals. No longer was I fixated on traditional visions of entrepreneurship; instead, I wrestled with tensions between capitalist imperatives and my desire to offer products and services that centred social impact over profit. This mirrors wider dilemmas faced by Black women entrepreneurs, who must navigate capitalism while protecting cultural and ethical integrity (hooks, 2000; Gilroy, 1993).

When tested in a small market, the SPEAK journal sold out, generating £1,000 in revenue. Plans to revise and formally publish it are now underway, further solidifying our commitment to building intergenerational legacies rooted in love, empowerment, and resilience.

The Power of Style: Crafting a Visual Language of Black Feminine Empowerment

Attempting again to enter what I call my "Top Gyal Season," I felt a powerful resurgence of the woman I had been before motherhood and societal expectations muted parts of my identity. Fashion and style, my lifelong tools of self-expression, became central to reclaiming my voice and visibility. Through clothing and design, I could construct a visual narrative that both reflected and reinforced who I was becoming.

As Tanisha C. Ford (2015) argues in *Liberated Threads*, fashion for Black women is not merely aesthetic; it is political, a radical assertion of presence and dignity in a world that seeks to render us invisible. "*You dress how you feel*" is a mantra that resonates deeply within Hip Hop culture, where fashion functions as both self-definition and socio-political critique.

Catherine McDermott (2018) further contends that fashion enables individuals to assert their uniqueness and challenge oppressive norms. Similarly, Vikki Tobak (2018) shows how Hip Hop fashion evolved as a language of aspiration, resilience, and resistance. Within this landscape, Black women have long used style to reclaim their bodies and identities from external projections (Crawford, 2017).

Although I was not yet operating at my fullest potential as a BFCEM, reconnecting with my sense of style reawakened hope and affirmed my agency. Fashion was not simply adornment, it was critical praxis, a visible manifestation of the inner work I was undertaking. It became part of how I envisioned the new version of myself and how I would model

resilience, self-love, and creative autonomy for my daughter and other Black women walking similar paths.

Big life

Live like wi trafficking

Rocketing

To di top a wah fi 'top eh ting

Wacky dip

Hockey dip

From me a juvenile a di money a call

Mi call mi daughter go Benz and mi son inna Audi

Youth dem nuh fi wuk fi nuh-bloodclaat-body

Wolla dem a call me legend and mi nuh past 40

Yo mi granny seh fi get it when yuh young and hearty

Mi priorities straight, mi nuh bruk off partly

Tyrant – Masika (2023)

Conclusion

This chapter offers a vivid and reflexive exploration of how BFCEMs mobilise creativity, intergenerational relationships, and cultural aesthetics to survive and thrive amid systemic constraint. In responding to Research Question 1, it demonstrates how racial discrimination, economic precarity, and cultural silencing not only shape but propel Black women into entrepreneurial ventures. These SPEC conditions act as catalysts that demand innovation, strategic adaptation, and alternative modes of value creation beyond traditional labour markets.

Through the development of the SPEAK journal and creative consulting roles during the COVID-19 pandemic, the chapter answers Research Question 2 by illustrating how BFCEMs navigate positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment through relational entrepreneurship and reflexive identity work. In this process, we see a strategic recalibration of values, where entrepreneurship is not merely economic survival, but a reassertion of

cultural integrity, maternal agency, and legacy-building. These strategies reveal a sophisticated ability to weave intergenerational resilience into ventures that challenge dominant scripts of respectability, productivity, and womanhood.

The chapter also directly addresses Research Question 3, showing how Hip Hop culture and aesthetics, through music, fashion, and embodied performance, serve as both a terrain of resistance and a toolkit for self-determination. Drawing on works by Tanisha C. Ford (2015), Vikki Tobak (2018), and Margo Crawford (2017), fashion and style are reframed here as critical tools of socio-political expression and cultural sovereignty. Hip Hop becomes more than influence, it becomes infrastructure, shaping how BFCEMs assert identity, mobilise resources, and speak to power.

Underpinned by DEP and TDBFE, this chapter exemplifies how embodied, experiential knowledge not only informs entrepreneurship but transforms it into a site of healing, power, and resistance. It foregrounds intergenerational co-creation, emotional reflexivity, and cultural legacy as fundamental principles of Black feminist economic praxis.

Ultimately, this chapter reframes entrepreneurship not as individual hustle but as collective reimagining, a process of building sovereign spaces where Black women and girls can explore, define, and elevate themselves across generations. In a world that so often demands their silence, BFCEMs speak boldly, creatively, and unapologetically. This is not just survival, it is vision. It is power. It is a blueprint for diasporic Black futures





Findings

Make it Make Sense

Research Findings, Recommendations & Conclusion

Introduction

"Her most powerful moment arrives when she realises she is free, free to create, lead, and live without apology, guided by purpose, and driven by her own vision. No explanation. No permission. Just the beauty of becoming all she is meant to be."

Nathania Atkinson (2024)

The chapter reaffirms the research aims of this thesis and summarises the key findings that address the research questions it posed. Subsequently, the chapter recapitulates its commitment to TDBFE and DEP as developed in the methodology, demonstrating how these elements were integrated into the thesis to enhance its depth and engagement.

Following this, the limitations of the study are discussed, providing a transparent assessment of the research scope and the constraints encountered.

The chapter then outlines potential directions for future research, offering insights into how the findings can be communicated, actioned, and implemented effectively to reach targeted audiences.

It presents specific recommendations to better support and preserve the experiences of BFCEMs navigating transatlantic spaces. These recommendations are informed by auto-ethnographic reflections and highlight the study's potential impact on policy, entrepreneurship and ownership, academic enrichment, interdisciplinary studies, and practical implementation.

The chapter concludes with final reflections on the continuous journey from survival to thriving, underscoring the enduring nature of this scholarly and personal exploration.

Research Questions

The core research questions guiding this thesis are:

1. What systemic and socio-cultural challenges faced by Black girls, women, and mothers serve as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship?
2. How do Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers who are Black, British and of the Jamaican diaspora navigate and achieve positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment within transatlantic socio-political contexts?
3. How does Hip Hop culture influence the identity formation, entrepreneurial practices, and socio-political engagement of Black girls, women, and mothers, particularly in shaping their roles as creative entrepreneurs?

Aims:

1. To explore the systemic, cultural, and personal challenges that influence Black girls, women, and mothers to pursue creative entrepreneurship
2. To examine the strategies employed by Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers to navigate positionality, upward mobility, and empowerment in transatlantic spaces.
3. To critically analyse the role of Hip Hop culture in shaping the entrepreneurial identity and practices of Black women, particularly its influence on reimagining their roles as creative entrepreneurs.

Research Objectives

1. Identify and analyse the key socio-cultural and systemic barriers encountered by Black girls, women, and mothers, particularly those that are Black British of the Jamaican diaspora, that act as catalysts for their engagement in creative entrepreneurship.
2. Investigate the coping strategies, support systems, and networks that Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers use to navigate the socio-political landscapes of the UK and the USA.

3. Examine the influence of Hip Hop culture on the identity, agency, and entrepreneurship of Black women, focusing on its role in empowering them to redefine their socioeconomic and cultural roles.
4. Employ embodied methodologies, including autoethnography, photo ethnography, and ethnomusicology, to capture the lived experiences of Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers.
5. Contribute to theoretical discussions by proposing the Transatlantic Diaspora Black Feminist Epistemology (TDBFE) as a framework for understanding Black women's entrepreneurship in global contexts.

Research Findings

Reframing Black Motherhood and Creative Resistance

This thesis makes a vital contribution to Black Feminist scholarship, entrepreneurial studies, and decolonial research methodologies by centring the lived realities of BFCEMs through the intersecting lenses of motherhood, systemic exclusion, creative praxis, and cultural sovereignty.

It challenges dominant paradigms that narrowly define entrepreneurship through systems rooted in European domination, economic exploitation, and patriarchal authority. Instead, it foregrounds how BFCEMs reimagine entrepreneurship as a mode of resistance, survival, and self-actualisation.

Through the theoretical innovation of TDBFE and the embodied methodological intervention of DEP, this research positions Black motherhood not as a site of deficit or constraint, as often portrayed in mainstream narratives, but as a dynamic locus of political agency, cultural authorship, and strategic leadership. Black motherhood emerges here as a radical praxis where creative expression across Hip Hop, digital storytelling, fashion, and community-building is mobilised both as a survival strategy and as an emancipatory, future-building project.

Importantly, the findings illuminate how BFCEMs navigate and resist the logics of racial capitalism that have historically extracted Black women's creative, emotional, and reproductive labour without adequate recognition or return. The "hustle mentality," deeply rooted in Hip Hop's survivalist ethos, continues to be a vital tool for sustaining vision and

spirit amidst precarity. However, a notable epistemic shift is evident: participants are moving beyond paradigms of struggle and survival toward intentional models of thriving, wellness, and intergenerational flourishing. Entrepreneurship is increasingly framed not merely as an economic necessity but as a sovereign, reparative act, a means of creating infrastructures of care, wealth, and cultural preservation outside of exploitative capitalist frameworks.

The stories shared, composite, anonymised, and autoethnographic, bear witness to the rhythms of resistance, the weight of inherited struggle, and the audacity of visionary world-making. From inner-city to international creative panels, from dance studios to documentary screens, BFCEMs are not a peripheral actor in entrepreneurial ecosystems; they are architects of alternative futures rooted in legacy, creativity, and communal care.

This thesis contends that BFCEMs are not simply surviving within hostile socio-economic conditions; they are actively building new infrastructures of belonging, sovereignty, and cultural leadership. Their practices resist extractive capitalist logics while reimagining entrepreneurship as an embodied, relational, and liberatory praxis.

Thus, this thesis is not an endpoint, but a beginning: a call to listen more deeply to the multidimensional experiences of Black women, to invest wisely in infrastructures that honour their creativity and care work, and to participate in building worlds that reflect the full spectrum of Black womanhood in motion, across bodies, borders, and generations.

Intergenerational Wealth, Thriving Models, and Sovereign Economic Ecosystems

The findings of this thesis reveal that BFCEMs are not merely surviving within exploitative capitalist systems; they are actively constructing sovereign economic ecosystems that challenge and transcend those systems. Rooted in intergenerational knowledge transfer, cultural resilience, and communal reciprocity, BFCEMs entrepreneurial practices extend beyond individual success narratives to foster collective wealth, cultural continuity, and economic sovereignty. These women are not simply participants in mainstream economic structures; they are architects of alternative economies that privilege relational wealth, holistic wellbeing, and long-term communal thriving. By cultivating enterprises that reinvest in community infrastructure, mentor future generations, and preserve cultural capital, BFCEMs offer a reparative blueprint for economic autonomy. Their work reframes entrepreneurship not as assimilation into extractive economies but as a radical project of sovereignty, where wealth is measured not solely by individual accumulation but by the capacity to nourish, sustain, and liberate diasporic communities across borders and generations.

Black Girlhood, Intergenerational Praxis, and Methodological Reflections

This research critically reframes Black girlhood not as a mere transitional stage toward womanhood, but as a vital site of identity formation, political consciousness, and creative self-fashioning. Through the lens of TDBFE, Black girlhood emerges as an epistemological and ontological ground zero, a space where notions of value, labour, and visibility are contested and negotiated from an early age. The findings highlight those experiences of adultification, educational discrimination, and hypervisibility or invisibility in media are not isolated incidents; rather, they are formative structures that shape Black girls' understandings of self-worth, social expectation, and agency. These early encounters with systemic inequity lay the groundwork for future entrepreneurial activity, whether through resistance, reclamation, or transformative recovery.

Moreover, the thesis identifies intergenerational entrepreneurship as a critical, yet underexplored, dimension of Black creative and economic praxis. Black Girls are not operating within atomised, individualistic frameworks commonly valorised in Western capitalist models of success. Instead, their entrepreneurial practices are deeply embedded within legacies of familial resilience, community care, and collective aspiration. Entrepreneurship is not a solitary endeavour but a relational, multi-generational strategy, rooted in cultural inheritance, spiritual continuity, and diasporic obligation.

Building on TDBFE, this intergenerational strategy is theorised as a transformative praxis wherein cultural knowledge, economic resilience, and creative agency are not simply passed down but actively reimaged, expanded, and recalibrated across generations. These findings challenge dominant narratives that depict entrepreneurship solely as a rupture from tradition; within Jamaican and British diasporic contexts, it is better understood as an extension and evolution of intergenerational survival strategies, now harnessed toward thriving, sovereignty, and cultural continuity.

Finally, the methodological reflections embedded throughout the research, particularly through DEP, reveal how embodied, creative, and relational methodologies are uniquely suited to capturing these nuanced realities. By centring an embodied methodology, the study illuminates how Black girlhood experiences are archived not only in memory or discourse but also through sound, movement, fashion, and ritual practice. DEP itself becomes a site of recovery and resistance, honouring Black girls' and women's knowledge production as legitimate, complex, and world-making.

In sum, this research deepens Black feminist praxis by demonstrating that economic survival, innovation, and creative sovereignty are fundamentally intertwined with familial love, collective memory, and diasporic imagination. Black girlhood, far from being peripheral,

is revealed as foundational to the entrepreneurial architectures that BFCEMs continue to build across transatlantic spaces.

Hip Hop, Transatlantic Resistance, and Entrepreneurial Futurism

This research identifies Hip Hop as a potent, albeit contested, space through which BFCEMs articulate visibility, creative production, and economic agency. In the United States context, BFCEMs have leveraged Hip Hop's global cultural capital to build ventures that merge cultural heritage with entrepreneurial ambition, positioning themselves within capitalist structures while simultaneously subverting them. Although the USA's commercialised Hip Hop landscape is often dominated by individualistic success narratives, BFCEMs extend these pathways toward community-rooted, values-led enterprises that challenge capitalist extraction logics, positioning them as architects of alternative futures.

Across the UK, USA, and Jamaica, this thesis evidences a transatlantic creative dialogue in which Hip Hop and Dancehall operate not only as expressive cultural forms but also as entrepreneurial frameworks. Despite contextual differences in political economy, systemic racism, and opportunity structures, these genres share a common language of resilience, resistance, and innovation. BFCEMs mobilise this shared language to navigate systemic exclusions while building both cultural and financial capital across diasporic spaces.

The entrepreneurial model embedded within Hip Hop praxis, exemplified through ventures like X31, extends beyond conventional economic imperatives. It redefines success, visibility, and creative authorship by anchoring entrepreneurship in narrative reclamation and cultural sovereignty. Whether through producing music, curating digital platforms, film/media or leading community initiatives, as architects of alternative futures, BFCEMs are actively reshaping public and commercial spaces, challenging dominant representations of Black womanhood, and asserting new entrepreneurial imaginaries.

This impact is further magnified through global engagements. Participation in industry panels, international residencies, and transnational creative networks enables BFCEMs to reposition themselves within historically exclusive creative economies. These engagements contribute to emerging understandings of positionality, mobility, and leadership, disrupting the structural marginalisation of Black women within global cultural industries.

One of the most salient themes emerging from participant interviews and autoethnographic reflections is the persistence of a "hustle mentality." While rooted in the socio-economic realities that shaped Hip Hop, this mindset exceeds reductive notions of grind culture or hyper-productivity. It operates as an adaptive epistemology through which vision, creativity,

and spirit are sustained amid economic marginalisation, racial capitalism, and gendered precarity. Here, cultural production is not merely instrumental but becomes a mode of self-determination, sovereign expression, and futurist world-making.

However, the findings also indicate an epistemic evolution. While the hustle remains a necessary response to precarity, BFCEMs are increasingly reorienting toward paradigms centred on thriving, wellness, and intergenerational sustainability. Entrepreneurship is thus reframed, not as a survivalist imperative, but as a sovereign strategy for economic self-determination, collective wellbeing, and resistance to systemic extraction

This shift constitutes a profound epistemic rupture, a transition from reactive survival strategies to proactive architectures of flourishing. Through the creation of creative enterprises that prioritise holistic wellness, community reciprocity, and long-term wealth-building, BFCEMs are generating new blueprints for diasporic entrepreneurship. These models challenge capitalist extraction logics and imagine alternative futures grounded in Black feminist visions of liberation.

Viewed through the lens of TDBFE, Hip Hop is not merely a cultural product but a politicised methodology, a living archive of diasporic struggle, resistance, and innovation. In this context, BFCEMs embody entrepreneurial resistance not as a deviation from tradition but as a continuation of an intergenerational continuum of cultural survival, sovereignty, and creative futurism.

Limitations of the Study

This thesis embraces autoethnography as a central methodological strategy, drawing upon the embodied experience of me as the researcher, a Black British woman of Jamaican heritage and a creative, entrepreneurial mother. While this approach enables a rich, reflexive engagement and facilitates an epistemological intimacy often absent from conventional research paradigms, it also introduces certain limitations inherent in autoethnographic and trans modal inquiry.

Subjectivity and Self-Editing: Autoethnography relied on my capacity as a researcher and subject to recall, interpret, and narrate personal experience. This process is invariably shaped by memory, affect, and strategic self-protection. As such, elements of omission, reshaping, or silencing, particularly when navigating experiences of trauma, systemic exclusion, or emotional fatigue, are acknowledged. Rather than constituting methodological failure, these silences are understood as integral to the complexity of embodied knowledge production, reflecting the layered realities of diasporic existence.

Scalability and Representativeness: Grounded in depth over breadth, the study does not seek statistical generalisability. Instead, it offers a textured, context-specific exploration of BFCEMs in the UK with a history and lived experience from transatlantic spaces. The findings are intended to generate resonance rather than replication, aligning with Black feminist methodological commitments to situated knowledges (Collins, 2000; Hill-Collins, 2009) and rejecting universalist claims.

Scope and Temporal Constraints: Given the geographic breadth of the research (UK, USA, Jamaica) and its multimodal methodologies (textual, visual, sonic), it was not possible to capture the full diversity of diasporic entrepreneurial practices or community responses. Important nuances, such as rural versus urban entrepreneurial strategies, generational shifts, or intra-Caribbean variations, remain vital areas for future research and expansion.

Despite these limitations, the thesis contributes methodological innovation through the development of DEP, a framework that legitimates lived experience, creative expression, and spiritual insight as valid sources of scholarly knowledge production. DEP offers a model for future research that not only centres Black women's experiences but also embraces creativity, reflexivity, and relationality as core epistemological commitments.

Autoethnographic Bias:

The primary methodology of this research employs autoethnography, centring on the narrative of me as the researcher, a BFCEM, Black British of Jamaican heritage. While this approach offers intimate insights, it inherently introduces self-editing and subjectivity, acknowledged as potential biases in autoethnographic research (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis, 2004). Efforts to maintain vulnerability and reflexivity throughout the process included documenting raw free-writing excerpts before iterations, integrating academic literature and critical analysis. These practices align with the latest recommendations on managing autoethnographic bias, emphasising transparency in capturing the researcher's thoughts and emotions to mitigate self-editing effects and enhance authenticity in representation (Wall, 2016; Lapadat, 2017). Rather than viewing subjectivity as a flaw, DEP embraces reflexivity and affective depth as critical to Black feminist knowledge production.

Limited Participant Diversity:

The informal conversations/interviews included family, friends and other BFCEMs from my network, which meant trust and enabling richer, more open exploration of personal topics

through informal conversations and collaborative, informal interviews came with ease. While this insider status facilitates depth, it may also introduce selection biases, potentially limiting the representativeness of BFCEMs (Collins, 2000; Laubscher & Powell, 2003).

Nevertheless, this thesis integration of broader literature affirms that the intersecting social, economic, and cultural experiences of Black girls, women, and mothers reflect shared systemic challenges across the UK (Birmingham), USA (New York City) and Jamaica, rooted in historical, socio-economic oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1989). By weaving diverse experiences with collaborative methods, the study aligns personal narratives with wider collective experiences.

Geographical and Cultural Scope:

The focus on the UK context, while providing specific insights into the Jamaican diaspora within this region, limits the generalisability of the findings. The socio-political and economic landscapes in different countries can significantly influence the experiences of BFCEMs, and the findings may not fully apply to other transatlantic or global contexts. However, this work aimed to highlight the specific experience of BFCEMs of the Jamaican diaspora and those who meet at this intersection who are seldom included, represented or visible in academic or wider research. Therefore, creating an opportunity for future academic work that is more equitable for Black women at this intersection. In addition, this research design can be applied to additional marginalised and underrepresented groups, highlighting nuances and insights that are overlooked by academic and social structures.

Community Engagement and Cultural Transformation

Throughout this research, it becomes clear that some BFCEMs conceptualise their enterprises not merely as individual ventures but as acts of community uplift, cultural preservation, and political resistance. In line with Hip Hop's foundational ethos of collective and counter-hegemony, BFCEMs use their platforms to amplify community and youth voices, strengthen local networks, and create spaces for healing, empowerment, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

This community-rooted approach reframes entrepreneurship as a culturally informed strategy of economic development, one that values communal reciprocity over capitalist individualism. To support and sustain this work, future interventions must prioritise reparative investments, such as targeted grant-making, community-driven capital frameworks, and accessible resource ecosystems that centre the lived realities of BFCEMs. Support must be

understood not as charity or benevolence, but as necessary reparative justice and as an investment in future-facing, sovereignty-building infrastructures.

Focus on English-Speaking Contexts:

The research predominantly explores the experiences of English-speaking Black women, potentially overlooking the experiences of non-English-speaking Black women within the diaspora. This limitation suggests a need for more inclusive research that encompasses a broader linguistic and cultural diversity.

Temporal Limitations:

The research captures specific periods evolving from memory work and reflexivity through to real-time. I acknowledge that the rapidly evolving socio-political climates may affect the relevancy and applicability of the findings over time. Including other languages could have potentially led to even richer insights and additional considerations when exploring this topic, something to consider when applying the research design to other marginalised groups. Longitudinal studies would help to understand how these dynamics change and persist across different time frames and generations.

These limitations highlight areas for future research to build upon the foundational work presented in this thesis. Addressing these constraints will not only enhance the robustness of the findings but also expand the scope and impact of understanding Black female creative entrepreneurial mothers' experiences within the Caribbean diaspora and beyond.

Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Cultural Empowerment

1. Recommendation: Establish **Transnational Sovereign Wealth Funds and Cooperative Investment Platforms** Led by BFCEMs

To support the sovereign economic ecosystems that BFCEMs are building, there must be investment in transnational wealth-building platforms owned and governed by Black women entrepreneurs themselves. This could include cooperative venture capital funds, peer-to-peer lending networks, and sovereign savings cooperatives that operate across diasporic regions (UK, USA, Jamaica, and beyond). These structures should be explicitly designed to:

- Enable capital circulation within Black communities without dependency on traditional financial institutions

- Prioritise funding for intergenerational business models, wellness economies, cultural preservation projects, and communal ownership initiatives
- Embed reparative justice principles into economic transactions, ensuring that returns are distributed not just upward but outward into communities

Value:

Such sovereign economic infrastructures would not only protect BFCEMs from the extractive demands of mainstream capitalism but would cultivate ecosystems of collective empowerment, legacy-building, and self-determined wealth creation that endure across generations.

2. Recommendation: Establish **Creative Industry Equity Accords**, binding policies across public and private cultural sectors that mandate a minimum percentage of commissions, funding allocations, and leadership roles to be led by BFCEMs. Inspired by equity frameworks like the "Rooney Rule" but adapted to cultural industries, these accords would structurally embed accountability into creative economies, shifting beyond tokenism toward reparative, systemic change.

Value:

Creative Industry Equity Accords would move equity from aspiration to infrastructure. They would ensure that BFCEMs are not only included but empowered to shape ownership, narratives, and wealth-building within the creative sector. This strategy advances cultural sovereignty, economic justice, and innovation by recognising and investing in the leadership, creativity, and community-building expertise of diasporic Black women.

3. Recommendation: Establish **Global Diaspora Leadership Summits** for BFCEMs, Integrating IP Sovereignty, TDBFE, and DEP

To sustain and amplify the leadership of BFCEMs within transatlantic and global creative economies, this thesis recommends the establishment of **Global Diaspora Leadership Summits**. These annual or biennial gatherings would be hosted by and for BFCEM's, anchored initially in the U.K, the USA, and Jamaica, with future replications across key diasporic hubs such as Ghana and Brazil. These summits would operate as sovereign spaces for cross-border collaboration, strategic knowledge exchange, cultural preservation,

investment mobilisation, and intergenerational mentorship, rooted explicitly in Black feminist epistemologies.

Crucially, the summits would institutionalise the use of the TDBFE and DEP frameworks, both as intellectual foundations and as licensable tools for expanding culturally relevant, community-rooted leadership models. TDBFE would guide the structuring of summit dialogues, ensuring intersectional, diasporic, and culturally sovereign approaches to entrepreneurship and leadership. DEP would be embedded into the methodology of the summits, through curated sensory experiences (e.g., soundscapes, movement practices, storytelling), to ensure embodied knowledge production and healing are central to leadership development.

Additionally, to protect and sustain the intellectual contributions of BFCEMs, the summits would introduce IP licensing strategies, ensuring that the methodologies, innovations, and cultural productions emerging from these gatherings are owned, attributed, and monetised ethically by the communities who generate them. This approach safeguards against extraction and co-option, positioning BFCEMs as rightful holders and distributors of their own intellectual and cultural assets.

Value:

Global Diaspora Leadership Summits would position BFCEMs not merely as participants in creative economies but as architects of sovereign economic, cultural, and intellectual ecosystems. By embedding IP protection, TDBFE, and DEP into their infrastructure, the summits would cultivate powerful new networks of diasporic leadership, amplify reparative wealth creation, and advance systemic transformation across global industries. This initiative would serve as a blueprint for creating sustainable, self-determined futures rooted in Black feminist visions of liberation, entrepreneurship, and intergenerational sovereignty.

4. Recommendation: Curate Interactive Cultural Archives to Preserve, Protect, and Amplify BFCEMs Legacies

This thesis recommends the creation of interactive cultural archives to protect and elevate the contributions of BFCEMs across the transatlantic Caribbean diaspora. These archives would be developed both digitally and physically, drawing on the DEP methodologies of this study, to capture the multidimensional realities of BFCEMs lives, creative outputs, and entrepreneurial innovations. The archives would integrate visual, sonic, and narrative

content drawn directly from lived experiences, curating an ecosystem of cultural memory that honours creativity, community leadership, and economic sovereignty.

More than passive repositories, these archives would be designed as dynamic, participatory platforms where BFCEMs can continually contribute new material, update narratives, and curate their own histories. They should incorporate licensing frameworks to ensure that the intellectual property (IP) embedded within the archives remains owned and controlled by the communities themselves, resisting the historical patterns of extraction and erasure that have plagued Black diasporic cultural production.

Guided by the principles of TDBFE, the archives would privilege Black women's knowledge production, emotional labour, spiritual practices, and entrepreneurial strategies as critical cultural and intellectual contributions. DEP would inform the sensory design of these spaces, ensuring that embodied memory, through soundscapes, ritual practices, fashion, and movement, becomes a core element of how cultural legacies are documented, shared, and celebrated.

Value:

Interactive Cultural Archives would radically enhance the visibility and cultural capital of BFCEMs by offering living, evolving platforms that foreground their leadership, creativity, and resilience. They would create critical pathways to attract strategic partnerships, funding, and global audiences while remaining firmly rooted in community ownership and epistemic sovereignty. Furthermore, these archives would serve as blueprints for other marginalised and diasporic communities seeking to protect their cultural production, providing models for ethical documentation, IP protection, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. In doing so, they would not merely preserve history; they would actively shape futures.

This research calls upon scholars, policymakers, cultural leaders, and funders to urgently adopt these frameworks to ensure systemic transformation.

Conclusion

Intricate Mastery stands as a contribution to Black feminist scholarship, creative entrepreneurship studies, and intersectional epistemology. By centring the lived realities of BFCEMs who are Black British and of Jamaican heritage, this research critically examines how Black girlhood, womanhood, and motherhood are sites of both oppression and radical possibility within transatlantic socio-political landscapes.

At its heart, this thesis introduces and operationalises the TDBFE, an original interdisciplinary framework synthesising Black Feminist Thought, Womanism, Intersectionality, Hip Hop Feminism, and Trap Feminism. TDBFE emerges not merely as a theoretical contribution but as a vital corrective to dominant paradigms that homogenise Black women's experiences. It illuminates how SPEC oppressions serve not only as barriers but as catalytic forces that ignite entrepreneurial creativity and sovereign resistance among BFCEMs.

This thesis critically reveals that creative entrepreneurship is not a retreat into capitalism's false promises, but a radical, reparative act through which BFCEMs assert sovereignty, community well-being, and cultural continuity. Through DEP, an embodied methodological innovation encompassing autoethnography, photo ethnography, ethnomusicology, and reflexivity, the research captures the sensory, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of Black women's world-making practices.

Key findings demonstrate that entrepreneurship for BFCEMs is deeply intertwined with resistance against extraction logics, the reimagination of wealth as relational and intergenerational, and the cultivation of alternative economies of care. The entrepreneurial praxis observed throughout the thesis shifts the narrative from mere survival to thriving and sovereignty, offering visionary blueprints for diasporic economic futures rooted in Black feminist liberatory politics.

Importantly, this research foregrounds Black girlhood not as a preparatory stage but as a world-building site where early encounters with adultification, discrimination, and hypervisibility forge the foundations for later entrepreneurial strategies. Hip Hop and Dancehall cultures emerge as politicised technologies of resistance, entrepreneurship, and diasporic futurism, providing critical spaces through which BFCEMs navigate visibility, cultural authorship, and financial sovereignty.

Methodologically, this thesis challenges disembodied research traditions, insisting that the affective, somatic, and cultural dimensions of Black women's lives are not peripheral but central to knowledge production. DEP validates embodied, creative, and spiritually informed methodologies as scholarly imperatives, thereby enriching Black Feminist Epistemology and decolonial research practices.

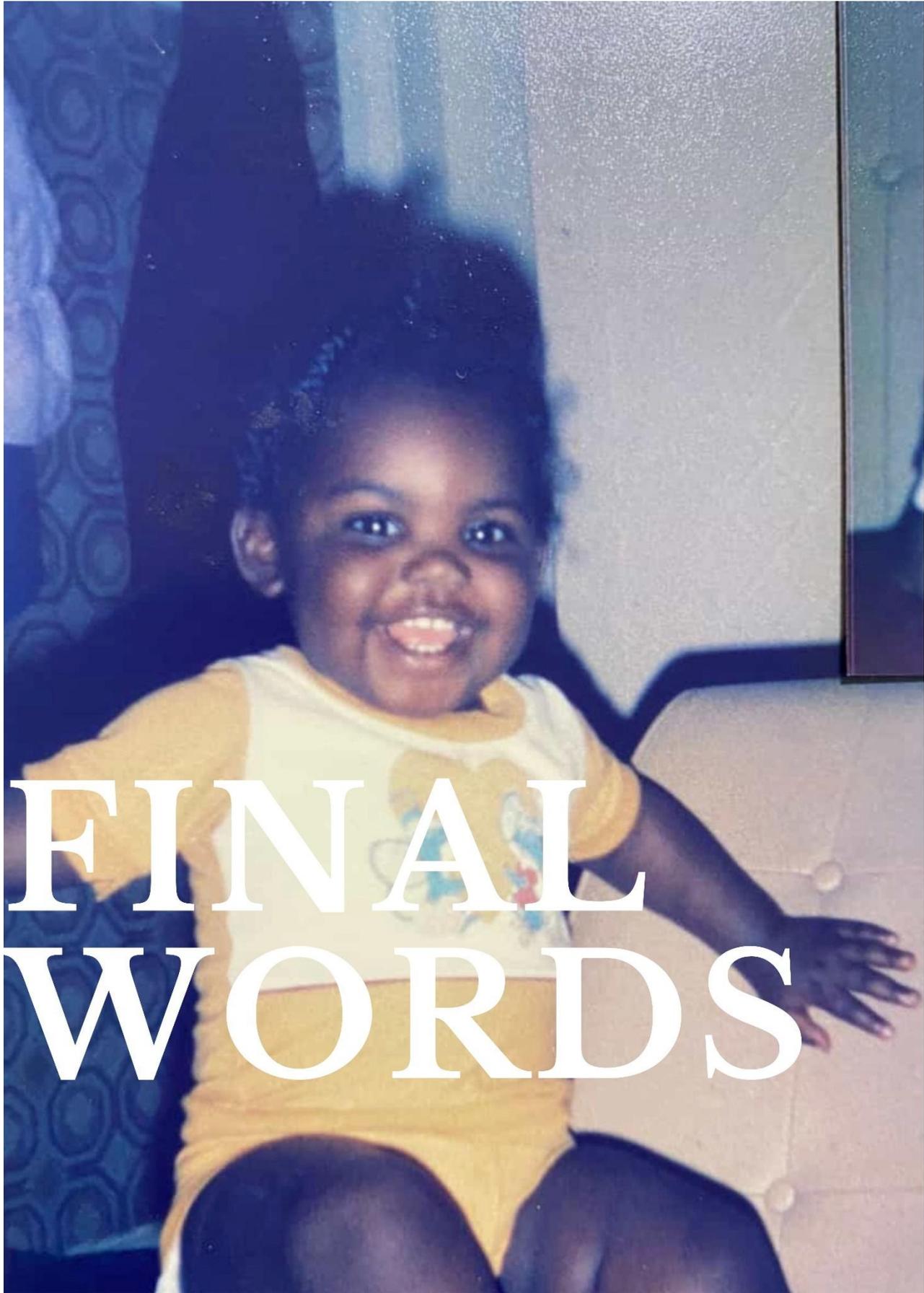
Beyond theoretical contributions, this study has implications for policy, creative industries, and education. It calls for systemic shifts through initiatives such as Creative Industry Equity Accords, Global Diaspora Leadership Summits, and the creation of Interactive Cultural Archives, underpinned by IP sovereignty strategies. These recommendations urge

stakeholders to move beyond performative inclusion toward infrastructural reparations and radical investment in Black women's cultural and economic leadership.

Ultimately, *Intricate Mastery* is not a retrospective account of oppression; it is a manifesto for sovereign futures. It envisions economies where Black women's creativity is not extracted but reverently invested in; where diasporic entrepreneurship becomes a site of collective wealth-building; and where Black girlhood is honoured as a generative force of global transformation.

This thesis asserts that BFCEMs are not merely navigating hostile systems; they are designing new worlds. Their intricate mastery of survival, creativity, and sovereignty offers nothing less than a blueprint for diasporic liberation in the 21st century and beyond.

Intricate Mastery is not only a record of past resistances but a map toward sovereign, intergenerational futures.



Final words

*"I wanna finish strong
I wanna finish brave
I wanna show the world
We don't have to live afraid
I wanna finish bold
And be able to say
I am someone courageous
And I, I wanna finish changed"*

Finish Strong -Naomie Raine (2015) 

Ten years after my father's passing, as I write these final words, the landscape of my life feels almost unrecognisable from when this thesis began. What was once a vibrant, interwoven family tapestry has been thinned by grief. We have lost younger cousins like Duane, dear family friends like Vulture, and, most heartbreakingly, all eight of my father's siblings. My Uncle Rodney and my father were the first to transition. Then, over the past two years, like a wave with no warning, we lost Aunt Deloris, Uncle Stanny, Uncle Wells, Aunt Angela, Uncle Fatman, Uncle Rhino, Aunt Leonie, and Karen, another beloved "other mother," just days after my father's and my birthdays. In between, my Nan, our family's cornerstone, suffered two major strokes. Though we were told she had only days to live, by God's grace, she is still with us, radiating strength. Her resilience reminds me daily that we are still standing, still breathing, and still becoming.

By May 2024, I felt empty. Life was still moving, work, PhD corrections, motherhood, the pursuit of dreams, but inside, I was navigating a terrain reshaped by loss. This is our new reality: a reconfigured Atkinson family, and a reimagined lifestyle for my Nan.

And yet, resilience remains. Though I have wrestled with the burden of the "Strong Black Woman" trope, I cannot deny the warrior spirit that sustains me. This strength is not a performance but a sacred offering, a commitment to keep showing up. To hold others while I too am breaking. To smile just long enough for someone else to find their joy. To wipe the tears of children who have seen too much too soon. And to keep breathing, praying, and believing that this all of this, is part of God's plan.

As a BFCEM, navigating power, positionality, and transatlantic mobility, my journey has been marked by grace, grit, and godliness. What I have lost in certainty, I have gained in clarity. I now lean fully into my multidimensional self, as mother, maker, strategist, scholar, and vessel of divine becoming. Through DEP and TDBFE, I have learned that our lived experiences are not peripheral, they are theoretical. They are data. They are maps for others to follow.

"An Offering for Sovereign Futures"

I began this thesis with a letter, a prayer, a promise.

And so, I return to it now, with a new offering: a coronation for every soul rising beyond survival into sovereign becoming.

To every little girl growing up in the hood, made to feel invisible, muted, or *"too much"*, you are not too much. You are the blueprint. You are the inheritance of worlds not yet seen.

To every single mother carrying the weight of abandonment, rejection, or shame, know this: survival was only the prologue. Sovereign flourishing is your true story. You are not broken. You are a bridge.

To every soul who has faced poverty, who has cried silent tears and clawed their way back from despair, remember: you were never meant to stay in the struggle. Your wealth, your joy, your ease are not luxuries; they are your birthrights. Your season is here.

To the dreamers who build visions too vast for small minds, do not shrink your genius to fit their fears. Keep building, keep daring, keep speaking life into ideas no one else can see yet. One of them will remake your world, and ours.

To the creatives, who dance, sing, paint, write, document, and design, your gifts are not hobbies. They are survival codes. They are sovereign technologies. Share them boldly; the world is starving for your truth, your beauty, your audacity.

Above all, believe in yourself.

Trust the sacred technology of your intuition.

Move with joy. Love without apology. Laugh loudly. Imagine limitlessly.

Liberate yourself from any script that was never written in your voice.

And to my daughter:

You are the living embodiment of limitless potential.

Stay ambitious. Stay audacious. Stay aligned. Pivot when you must, but never, ever shrink your brilliance for spaces too small to hold you.

You are my muse, my masterpiece, and my most sacred legacy. I love you beyond language. I love you into the future worlds we are building together.

We are not just surviving.

We are sovereign architects of new worlds.

We are not just dreaming.

We are constructing futures, rooted in joy, crowned with ease, destined for abundance.

We are already becoming.

And we are unstoppable.

*“Let Him turn it in your favour
Watch Him work it for your good
He's not done with what He's started
He's not done until it's good*

Hello, peace

Hello, joy

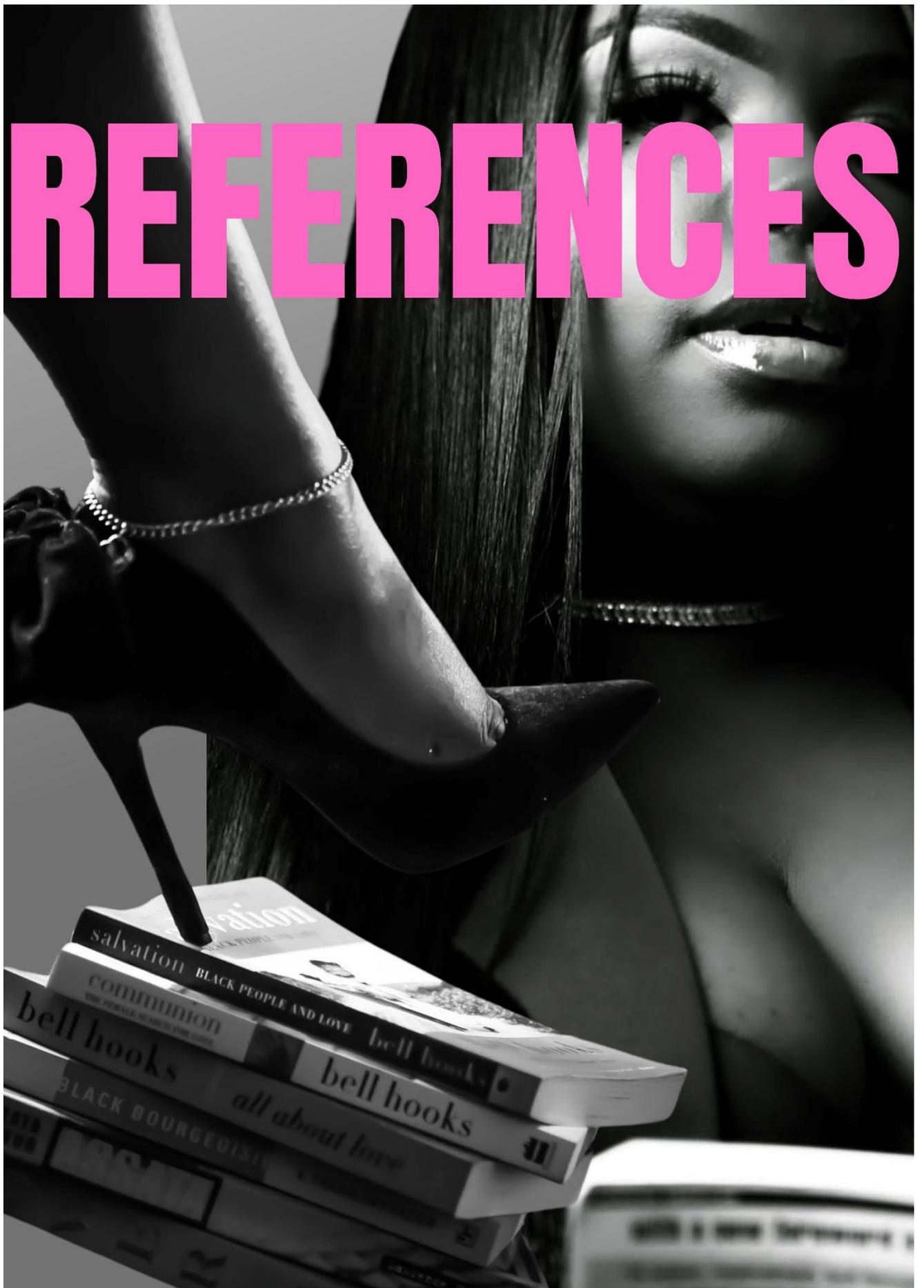
Hello, love

Hello, strength

*Hello, hope, **It's a New horizon**”*

Fear is not my Future - Todd Galberth Ft Tasha Cobbs (2022) 

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15. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.756066/full#:~:text=The%20phrase%20%E2%80%9CIt%20takes%20a,to%20realize%20their%20hopes%20and> / 28/12/2022
16. (natagenda4blackgirls.org)
17. Pharell 2022 [Pharrell "Chords Are Coordinates" #rapper #interview \(youtube.com\)](#)

Image List

Number	Description
1-3	Zeal contemporary
4-6	The one day film set
7	X3I Logo by Nathania Atkinson and Myke Forte
8-13	X3I promotional Booklet
14-23	X3I Booklet continued
24	X3I Power campaign
25	X3I "Death B4 Dishonour Campaign
26	A campaign shoot was done for an emerging streetwear brand

27	A lingerie shoot for the X3I boutique INDULGENCE label.
28-29	X3I campaign shoots with bespoke designed INDULGENCE garments.
30	Emerging artist single cover
31	An interview conducted by Miss Nathania as part of the X3I blog with one of the original Hip Hop Music Video Vixens Inga Newson;
32	Bashy interview,
33	Gavin Douglas Campaign shoot
34	Music Video scenes and X3I features
35	MVISA awards
36	X3I Team and CEO of Digi wax media
37	Global women in music
38	Miss Nathania and Drumma Boy
39	Mum and Dad at MVISA awards
40-41	Artist and Entrepreneur Laisse Sanchez
42	Singers
43-44	Blobo, Fatman, Rhino
45	Black Symbol Band and others
46	Family Gathering
47	Dad DJ'ing
48	Dad doing Candy Dance
49-51	Nay and Stormzy, Me Teyanna Taylor and Nay, Joey Badass and Nay
52	Johnnie Cochran, Female Lawyer and Dad
53	Dad in office
54	Dad on one of our family holidays
55	Atkinson Spence
56	Voice New Paper Article
57-59	Dads Funeral
60	Dads Headstone
61	Dad, Aunty Jeniffer and my Mum
62	Mum, Nan, Aunty Jenifer, Aunty Dassa, My sister
63	Big Chop
64-66	Accra Market, and school girls
67-72	Ghana
73-74	Texas NAAAS
75-76	Ivy Daughter birthday before Lockdown

77-81	Family during lockdown
82-84	Duane, Me and Twins, Family
85	Style and power
86	Foxy Brown
87-88	Nicki Minaj, Lil Kim
89	Critical Challenges face by BFCEM
90	Discovery despite challenges
91	Attributes
92-94	Road Map

Playlist

