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Blank Faces, Blank Minds

The Postcolonial Racial Binary Reversed in Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses*

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Introduction

Malorie Blackman wrote over fifty different works, including picture books, television scripts and books for early readers, before she decided to write the story of what would become *Noughts & Crosses*, the first novel in a trilogy (Flood). The novel is set in a fictitious version of a westernised country, similar to Britain, in which the colonisation of Africa is reversed. Therefore, in this dystopian novel, African people are the ones who developed new technology and explored the world. As a result, they colonised Europe and became the dominant race, referred to in the novel as Crosses, whereas the colonised people are referred to as noughts. However, despite slavery itself never being evident in the novel, as the story is set fifty years after abolition, segregation and class differences still exist between the two groups. The novel follows the early lives of the two protagonists, Persephone Hadley, referred to as Sephy, and Callum McGregor. The former is the daughter of the Prime Minister and a Cross, whereas the latter is a nought and the son of the Hadley family's former housekeeper, Margaret McGregor. After Margaret's dismissal from the Hadley residence, her friendship with Mrs Hadley is broken. They both try to keep their children apart, but this proves futile and the barriers placed on the young lovers results in a plot similar to that of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. However, unlike Shakespeare, Blackman adds the element of race into the equation.

*Noughts & Crosses* can be considered a young adult novel as novels in this genre "can link society's turbulence, its most pressing and disturbing issues, with the adolescent's quest for identity in coming of age" (Hilton and Nikolajeva 9). Two of the central themes of novels within this genre are death and sexuality, something which the protagonists in *Noughts & Crosses* both encounter, and when
this has happened "childhood is over, and there is no way back to Arcadia" (Hilton and Nikolajeva 12), that is, there is no possibility to return to the innocence of childhood. Furthermore, the story is told in a first-person narrative form, with each chapter alternating between Sephy and Callum, and, in some instances, the same sequence of events is related from two different perspectives. According to Blackman, she has been criticised in the past for writing about black characters without showing awareness of racial issues (Flood). Consequently, Blackman's aim in *Noughts & Crosses* is to challenge the status quo and people's preconceptions of racism in society. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Blackman discusses an incident in the novel where a nought child has to wear a plaster, which stands out as the plaster is brown, and she means that "[i]f you're the majority you don't necessarily see it because you don't need to see it and that's what I wanted to explore by turning the tables" (qtd. in Flood). Indeed, brown plasters only recently entered the British market (Russell) and Sarah Heinz claims that a white plaster on dark skin contributes to the notion that "[w]hat is supposed to blend in stick out and therefore underlines that the person wearing it does not conform to the norm" (92). By exposing this problem, Christine Wilkie-Stibbs argues that Blackman "lays bare the binary structuring of power that inscribes identity and agency" ("The 'Other' Country", hereafter "Other", 241), and exposes how the power structure in society systematically excludes certain groups. Indeed, Blackman has admitted that her inspiration for *Noughts & Crosses* "grew out of a lifetime of experiences. Some of the racist incidents in the book were based on real events from my childhood" (Malorie).

The novel has won multiple awards (such as the Fantastic Fiction Award and the Children's Book Award) and in 2013 Blackman was awarded the role of
Children's Laureate, which is a position given to "an eminent author or illustrator of children's books to celebrate outstanding achievement in their field" (BookTrust). The jury's motivation for this appointment was that Blackman creates tales for young people and thus encourages them to spend time away from the internet and video games (BookTrust). *Noughts & Crosses* has also been adapted into a play by the Royal Shakespeare Company which ran in Stratford-upon-Avon between 2007-2008, and it is also being filmed for television by the BBC and is scheduled for transmission on BBC One in 2017. Despite this recognition, very little research has been done into *Noughts & Crosses* and indeed, Blackman's work in general. From a research standpoint, the novel can be analysed from a number of different perspectives, though the most obvious approach is perhaps the application of postcolonial theory and the effect that colonisation has had on people and society.

Wilkie-Stibbs states that, at first glance, it can be argued that *Noughts & Crosses* is simply another example "of young adult fiction tackling the age-old problem of racial division" ("Other" 237). Clémentine Beauvais compares the forbidden love between the races in *Noughts & Crosses* to that portrayed in Stephanie Meyer's fantasy bestseller *Twilight*, and discusses how both these romances result in hybrid children, who are not welcome on either side. In Beauvais's text, just as in Wilkie-Stibbs's, the focus is on society, but Beauvais's focus lies on Sephy and the hybrid child, Callie Rose, who is the eventual outcome of her relationship with Callum, and also the protagonist in the last novel in the trilogy. This previous research on Blackman's dystopian novel touches upon the postcolonial aspect, but does not present a primary focus on either of the two protagonists and their process of formation, or Bildung; rather the focus lies on
society and the dichotomies that it presents. Therefore, this essay will be situated within a cultural and racial context and thus contribute to existing research via an examination of Callum in relation to the other characters. The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that Callum's actions are used as a way to criticise and oppose power structures in the postcolonial society, and that these actions contribute to his Bildung. The four concepts of mimicry, identity, language and race will be examined in relation to Callum and his development in order to demonstrate how he comes to terms with living in the postcolonial society. Even though these concepts may seem very different at first glance, they are all connected and can, sometimes, be difficult to separate. Firstly, the concept of mimicry will be explained and connected to cultural identity and racial stereotypes. This will be followed by a section which details the creation of Callum's identity as an individual of a subjugated race, but also as a mimic, and compares his actions to people around him. The third chapter will discuss the meaning of language and its importance for the construction of individual identity and this section draws on Ngugi wa Thiong'o's idea of the subjugated soul. Having connected language to identity, this thesis will highlight Callum's struggle for equality in order to show that his efforts are in vain, as the colour of his skin stops him from attaining equality with the dominant group. Finally, it is concluded that Callum's identity is in constant fluctuation, but that it is first when he finally finds a balance between mimicry and subjugation that he can fully stand up to authority, which leads to his execution.

Postcolonial Theory As A Way to Disrupt Colonial Authority
In his article, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", Homi K. Bhabha presents the concept of mimicry, which he claims is a form of camouflage that the colonised individual uses to blend into society (126). It can be a way of acting or talking that the individual emulates from the ruling discourse. This camouflage can, however, be transformed into an important tool for the colonial power. It enforces the dominant group's right to rule, and implicitly encourages the colonised individual to be similar, but not identical to the coloniser (Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", hereafter "OMM" 126). Furthermore, Bhabha explores ideas proposed by Samuel Weber, and suggests that mimicry is a form of castration, as "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" ("OMM" 126). The difference is important, as it is what separates the controller from the controlled, but to continue to be effective as a tool of subjugation, the difference between coloniser and colonised must be recognisable (Bhabha, "OMM" 126).

However, since mimicry itself stems from rejection of the difference between the two groups, it becomes an ambivalent creation when it "appropriates the Other as it visualizes power" (Bhabha, "OMM" 126). That is, to begin emulating the ruler, the controlled individual must first acknowledge that there exists a difference between coloniser and colonised, something which may become paradoxical as the goal is to prove that there is no difference at all. For a ruling authority, this can become problematic as, by turning mimicry into a normalised state, another state must be suppressed and the vision of the utopia, which the ruling power is built upon, is no longer valid ("OMM" 126).

In order to reinforce its own superiority, the controlling authority must control the way the colonised people see themselves (wa Thiong'o 1135). This is
done by constantly repeating and reinforcing ideas and actions as "certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge emerge" (wa Thiong'o 1133). In terms of mimicry, this would mean that the colonised individuals behave in a way which the ruling authority has deemed acceptable. According to wa Thiong’o, these repetitive experiences, together with the reinforced ideas, are then inherited by the following generation, thus becoming the “basis for their further actions on nature and on themselves” (1134). That is, children will see their parents being dominated and convinced that they are less worthy, as the parents accept the authority's culture as a norm, and the children will thus reject their own, indigenous culture and traditions. This rejection is a manifestation of the control exerted upon a colonised people as “economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others” (wa Thiong’o 1135). Furthermore, wa Thiong'o claims that it is possible to subjugate a soul via the use of language, which can be connected to how people express themselves, as "[l]anguage was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (1130).

However, it is important to note that language is not a static concept, and when used in connection with culture, the culture becomes "a product of the history which it in turn reflects" (wa Thiong'o 1134). Therefore, it can be argued that culture itself is not a static concept, but rather something which changes with time and place (Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences", hereafter "Cultural" 156). Stuart Hall echoes this idea and proposes that the concept of cultural identity can be seen in two ways ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora ", hereafter "CID", 435). First, as a "collective 'one true self" ("CID" 435), where
people who share an ancestry and history become one people, and it is this view, Hall claims, that is the underlying identity which must be discovered and brought to light as it "played a critical role in all post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world" ("CID" 435). The alternative perspective is demonstrated when the individual experience takes precedence over the collective suffering. This also acknowledges that a personal identity is subject to a moving past and "[c]ultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (Hall, "CID" 435). As such, cultural identity, just like culture itself, is not a static concept, instead it is a blend of past and present, as new impressions interact with older, established ideas (Hall, "CID" 435).

This shift becomes increasingly evident in a postcolonial society. According to Achille Mbembe, an individual in a postcolonial society must learn to shift between several identities, as society is built upon different public spaces: "the postcolony is made up not of one 'public space' but of several, each having its own logic yet liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain contexts" (119). Additionally, Mbembe claims that it is only when these spaces interact, that the postcolonial individual "is publicly visible" (120). This becomes clear in a society built on attributing certain traits to a specific race. The idea that race is a social construct is also something that is discussed by Ian F. Haney López, who claims that any attempt "to racially define the conquered, the subjugated or enslaved" (971) also becomes a way to define their counterparts as one cannot exist without the other. Haney López and Mbembe are not alone in their conviction. Black American writer, Toni Morrison, argues that in Western literature, especially American literature, it is common to give the role of a supporting character to a black character, rather than allowing a black character to
be a protagonist (5). Because of this, she claims, the black presence lingers on the outskirts, rather than plays a central role in American literature, which leads to the construction of "a real or fabricated Africanist presence" (Morrison 6). According to Morrison, The United States is not alone in this construction; "South America, England, France, Germany, Spain - the cultures of all these countries have participated in and contributed to some aspect of an 'invented Africa'" (Morrison 7).

The Creation of an Anti-Colonial Identity

The creation of an identity is never simple. An identity is, as Hall claims, a blend of impressions from both past and present, dependent on the culture which surrounds it ("CID" 435). Additionally, individuals in a postcolonial society will struggle with their identities as their past is either that of the coloniser or of the colonised. Furthermore, the individuals who identify as colonised will either have to try and fit in via the use of camouflage, thus claiming equality, or acknowledge their own value as being less. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that Blackman, in the novel Noughts & Crosses, exposes the reasons why oppositions exist in society through the manner in which she describes the political landscape, namely with "sharp social divisions between the privileged, black 'Cross' (uppercase) elite and the disempowered, white 'nought' (lower-case) underclass" ("Other" 243). This distinction is clear already in the prologue of Noughts & Crosses, where Callum's mother is working as a housekeeper for the Hadley family. Despite being a friend to Mrs Hadley, it becomes clear that it is Mr Hadley who is the head of the family and that Margaret is nothing more than a servant whose opinion he has no need of:
'I was just thinking about my son and your daughter. Wouldn't it be nice if...?' Appalled, she bit back the rest of the sentence, but it was too late.

'What would be nice?' Mr Hadley prompted, silkily.

'If they could ... could always stay as they are now.' At Mr Hadley's raised eyebrows, Meggie rushed on. 'At this age, I mean. They're so wonderful at this age - children, I mean. So... so...'

(Blackman 9)

Here, Margaret wishes that the children could continue to play together as equals, but decides not to voice her thoughts to Mr Hadley and instead tells him that she wishes that they would never grow up. She realises that despite being a friend of Mrs Hadley, who expresses her happiness over their friendship: "It's lucky we're such good friends" (Blackman 7), Margaret is not an equal. She dares to speak to Mrs Hadley on equal terms: "[t]hat sense of humour of yours will be the death of me yet" (Blackman 7), but finds herself cowed in the company of the Prime Minister, not only as the housekeeper in the company of the employer, but also as a nought in the eyes of a Cross, as well as the colonised to the coloniser. It is this sense of being similar, but not the same, which Bhabha argues "fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" ("OMM" 127). In other words, it becomes a desire of the coloniser to ensure that the colonised subject does not threaten the colonialist authority (Bhabha, "OMM" 129). As wa Thiong'o observes: "its [colonisation's] most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and
their relationship to the world" (1135). In this sense, Margaret's knowledge of being inferior keeps her from speaking her mind to Mr Hadley, and this suggests that she has effectively become colonised (wa Thiong'o 1133).

Moreover, when Mr Hadley questions his wife in private regarding a supposed affair, she lies and tells him that she spent the evening with Margaret. This leads to Mr Hadley questioning Margaret regarding what she did the previous night and she answers that she had a quiet night at home with her family. As Margaret misses Mrs Hadley's hints and does not answer accordingly, she is later dismissed by Mrs Hadley. This changes her perspective towards the Hadley family and she later confesses that "[a]nyone who can put up with that stuck-up cow Mrs Hadley is a better person than me" (Blackman 63). When Callum questions her about the friendship the two women used to have, Margaret answers that "[w]e were never friends . . . She patronised me and I put up with it 'cause I needed a job - that's all" (Blackman 63). Margaret rejects any notion of a comparison to Mrs Hadley and thus embraces the identity of the subjugated nought as she realises that she will never work for another Cross family again (Blackman 13). Here, it is also possible to see how Margaret's individual experience of being dismissed from her position at the Hadley residence colours her view and she later expresses that she wishes for noughts and Crosses to remain separate, thus echoing the view of the coloniser, as the difference between the two must be clear, something which will happen if they are being kept separate (Bhabha, "OMM" 126).

Margaret's view of the separation of the two races is not shared by Callum, who begins to create his own identity based on both past and present experiences. He sees himself as equal to Sephy, but still acknowledges that he is not. Thus, Callum still finds himself separate from the "collective 'one true self" (Hall, "CID"
435), which means that he cannot identify with other noughts who have similar experiences. Because of this, Callum has difficulties taking his friendship with Sephy and his place in society for granted, and he raises the point to Sephy: "This place is like the whole world, and the whole world is about this place. So where could I go?" (Blackman 21). Sephy answers that "[t]his place isn't so bad, is it?" (Blackman 21), but Callum means that since she belongs to the ruling Crosses, she cannot see his point of view.

The jealousy Callum feels, as well as the desire to be allowed to belong to the dominant group, become clearer as he enters the area where he lives: "Why couldn’t my family live in a house like Sephy’s? . . . Looking at our rundown hovel, I could feel the usual burning, churning sensation begin to rise up inside me" (Blackman 31-32). According to Bhabha, for mimicry to take place, the difference between the top, in this case the Crosses, and the bottom, the noughts, must be acknowledged and disproven ("OMM" 126). It is this struggle by the individual to disprove the discrepancy which becomes the aggravating factor for the ruling authority (Bhabha, "OMM" 131). This can best be described in the words of Callum's father, Ryan, who mentions that "if our boy is going to get anywhere in this life, he has to go their schools and learn to play the game by their rules. He just has to be better at it, that's all" (Blackman 36). In an attempt to prove his being of equal value to the Crosses, Callum takes the entrance exam to be able to attend Heathcroft High School, the same school as Sephy, and is one of four noughts to be accepted into the school, as they are what Mr Hadley refers to as "the crème-de-la-crème of nought youth" (Blackman 65). Here, Wilkie-Stibbs argues that the Prime Minister uses a rhetoric which bases itself on "inclusion and assimilation" ("Other" 243) and thus cements the differences between the noughts
who possess "sufficient aptitude" (Blackman 65) and those who do not. Furthermore, this reinforces the image of "reformed, recognizable Other" (Bhabha, "OMM" 126) as the noughts, who pass the entrance exams and gain access to the school, have the opportunity to assimilate and thus become similar to the Crosses in every way except for the colour of their skin. According to Mbembe, in the postcolonial society, "the twin project of emancipation and assimilation . . . was reduced to an endless interrogation of the possibility" (20), in which the colonised individual struggles to find a balance between the traditional image perceived of African life, and the loss which occurs in the assimilation into the modern society (20). In Noughts & Crosses, this can be translated to Callum finding a balance between being a nought while, at the same time, maintaining his equality to his fellow Cross students, and proving that both sides are equal, something that his brother, Jude, does not agree with: "You'll soon think you're too good for us . . . Just don't go getting too big for your boots! (Blackman 37). Additionally, this internal struggle can end "either in acceptance of a tragic duality and an inner twoness" (Adembe 21), or the individual may become extraordinarily sensitive regarding the own identity and thus stress the "absoluteness of the African self" (Adembe 21). For Callum, the internal struggle is ongoing and in the following chapter, it can be seen how he tries to come to terms with his place in society through the use of language.

Language as a Means of Control

Throughout Noughts & Crosses, there are several words which serve as degrading terms for the respective races. The noughts use the derogatory term 'dagger' for
Crosses, whereas the Crosses use 'blankers' for the noughts that they disagree with. By themselves, it can be argued that these words are just arbitrary, but according to postcolonial critic Bill Ashcroft, the meaning of a word changes depending on how it is used, and he claims that "[t]he central feature of the ways in which words mean things in spoken or written discourse is the situation of the word" (279). This thought is echoed by wa Thiong'o, who claims that it is possible for language to have "a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning" (1131). This is exemplified in an argument between Callum and Jude, where the latter tells their mother that Callum "was with his dagger friend" (Blackman 32) as an answer to her enquiry of his whereabouts. This form of pejorative language used to address an ethnic group suggests an existing degrading view of the group as a whole.

According to wa Thiong'o, language can be used to subjugate a people, which also means that a ruling power can control the colonised people's images of themselves via the use of language (1130). This type of domination is reflected in the way that there exists solidarity between the noughts and an understanding that they are worth less than the Crosses. This is best expressed by Jude in a discussion between the three siblings, when he exclaims that "I'm the only one of the three of us who knows what he is and accepts it" (Blackman 51). Thus, it can be argued that Jude is colonised as he accepts his role as inferior to Crosses, just like Margaret. As the siblings' argument continues, Callum's sister, Lynette, exclaims that "I don't behave like that. I can't be a nought. I just can't" (Blackman 51). Lynette had, like Callum, been in a relationship with a Cross, but she had subsequently been a victim of abuse at the hands of other noughts because of this behaviour, perceived as deviant by her own social group. As a result of the
physical abuse, she has suffered a head-trauma and sees herself as a Cross, thus taking the opposite standpoint from Jude in the argument; "Look at my skin . . . Such a beautiful colour. So dark and rich and wonderful" (Blackman 51). In this context, Lynette's view of her skin colour can be compared to the view Pecola, in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, has regarding her brown eyes; "[t]hey are pretty, you know. I know. He really did a good job. Everybody's jealous. Every time I look at somebody, they look off" (134).

According to wa Thiong'o, language carries the "[v]alues [which] are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race" (1134). Moreover, when language is being used as a form of culture it becomes "the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (wa Thiong'o 1134). Additionally, he claims that it is almost impossible to differentiate between culture and the language used to express it (1134). However, in Blackman's novel it is important to note that despite the noughts and Crosses speaking the same language, that is, the noughts have no separate language of their own and there is no difficulty in the understanding between the two races, language usage still reflects either race's cultural heritage. In the context of Blackman's novel, this means that the term nought, becomes inextricably associated, in the Cross's coloniser's discourse, with behaving in an unacceptable way, and as exemplified with Lynette, she sees her brothers arguing and, in her head, she connects this to them being noughts, rather than just siblings having a disagreement. She then takes on the rhetoric of the abuser and even sees herself as different from her own family. For Callum, Lynette's words are especially disturbing as he tries to prove his equality to the Crosses, without claiming that he is one, while he, at the same time, is seen as a nought, and thereby worth less, by
his mentally unstable sister, whose views uncannily echo those of the colonial discourse she mimics in her illness.

However, Callum's view of his equality to the Crosses changes as he enters Heathcroft. From having been a nought child with a Cross friend, where the colour of the skin does not matter, Callum is forced to face the harsh reality of how noughts are treated differently in society. The situation on the first school day is similar to that of Little Rock Nine in Arkansas, United States, during integration, where nine black students were abused by an angry mob as they entered Central High School on September 4th, 1957 (Johnson 130-131). As they enter the school grounds, Callum and his three fellow nought students are attacked by upset Cross students and parents and when one of these throws a stone, it hits one of the nought students in the head.

As the commotion continues, Sephy expresses annoyance with the headmaster of the school, as he refuses to act in protection of the nought students, and she decides to yell in order to make herself heard; "STOP IT! YOU'RE ALL BEHAVING LIKE ANIMALS! . . . WORSE THAN ANIMALS - LIKE BLANKERS!" (Blackman 56). Her outburst shocks Callum, because he realises that even though she may not see noughts in the same way as Lynette does, the word blanker, a term of abuse against noughts, is still a word which comes to her mind. Through her use of the word blanker, Sephy, echoes her father and the view which exists in society that noughts are worse than animals. Here, Callum's view of himself as an equal to Sephy crumbles as he realises that they may be similar, but they are not same; "I’m not a blanker. I may be a nought but I’m worth more than nothing. I’m not a blanker. A waste of time and space. A zero. I’m not a blanker. I'M NOT A BLANKER" (Blackman 57). Furthermore, at this point it is
not only Callum's own identity which begins to crumble, but also his view of the collective self as he begins to mentally distance himself from his own community.

He differentiates between noughts such as himself, and other noughts that he deems to be less, the blankers. It is this split which Bhabha claims enables the colonial rule, as in "'normalizing' the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge as its terms ("OMM" 126). By moving away from his own group, in this case the noughts, Callum reinforces the colonial idea that a difference between coloniser and colonised exists. Thus, the segregation becomes more evident, to the point where Callum himself is the one reinforcing it, which can be seen as he tells Sephy that "I've been thinking it over and... well, we can still be together outside of school but I don't think you should talk to me when we're in school" (Blackman 59). Callum's view, together with the existing prejudice towards noughts also helps to reinforce the stereotype of how noughts are inferior to Crosses, as expressed by one of his Cross classmates: "'They smell funny and they eat peculiar foods and everyone knows that none of them are keen to make friends with soap and water'" (Blackman 83).

The two views, Callum's and that of his classmate, further emphasise the colonial rule as the classmate's words serve to degrade the noughts and Callum's sense of identity becomes destabilised. The inferiority complex that Callum feels can be explained via wa Thiong'o's claim that colonialism "involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture . . . and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser" (1135). This is further exemplified by the term 'blanker', as it also refers to the skin colour of the noughts, thus serving to be a way for Crosses to refer to noughts, but also a
way for noughts to differentiate between themselves. One of the Cross students at Heathcroft, Lola, explains the term as "[b]lank, white faces with not a hint of colour in them. Blank minds which can’t hold a single original thought. Blank, blank, blank,’ Lola recited. ‘That’s why they serve us and not the other way around’" (Blackman 85). This form of prejudice based on the colour of the skin will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, which explores the concept of race.

**No Equality - Race as a Determining Factor**

Historically, in the United States, whether or not a person could be considered to be a free citizen or a slave depended on the status of the mother. If the mother was a free woman, then the child was free, and should the mother be a slave, then the child would be born into a life of slavery (Haney Lopéz 964). According to Ian F. Haney Lopéz, the concept of race is based on prejudice, but still manages to be a very important aspect in every individual's life (965). Furthermore, Haney Lopéz argues that the idea that there are genetic traits which are shared by all within the same race is faulty, and that instead the difference is greater within the same groups than it is between various races (Haney Lopéz 967). Nevertheless, "[t]he characteristics of our hair, complexion, and facial features still influence whether we are figuratively free or enslaved" (Haney Lopéz 965).

When translating the concept of slavery into the postcolonial dystopian society in *Noughts & Crosses*, the discerning factor between those who were slaves and those who were not is the colour of their skin. Despite Callum being of the opinion that the colour of his skin does not matter when it comes to his intellectual abilities, he still expresses a wish to be able to "afford the treatment to
make my skin permanently darker" (Blackman 173). More importantly, this wish is triggered when Callum sees a nought at Lynette's funeral: "He looked almost mixed race - lucky beggar" (Blackman 173) and it is expressed in passing, thus further exemplifying his fluctuation between feeling inferior and equal at the same time. The feeling of wanting to gain membership to the dominant group, does, according to American anthropologist James G. Ferguson, confirm "the claim of the racist colonizer: that 'African' ways were inferior to 'European' ones" (553). That is, by having these thoughts, Callum echoes the idea that noughts are inferior to Crosses.

In his pursuit of equality, Callum voices his complaint regarding the one-sided version of history which is presented during a history lesson. The teacher, Mr Jason, mentions several explorers, who are all Crosses and promptly ignores Callum when he raises his hand to answer, despite no other student doing the same. Refusing to be discouraged, Callum mentions that there have been several prominent nought scientists as well, but Mr Jason once again refuses to acknowledge it and asks Callum how he dares to "spread these pathetic lies about nought scientists and inventors" (Blackman 137). Here, Blackman uses experiences from her own childhood and claims that if she had learnt about African-American scientists when she attended school, then "maybe I wouldn't have written this book" (444). She thus criticises the power structure in society which focuses on white history; "we didn't learn about any of them - except Robert Peary, the white European-American explorer" (444).

Blackman transposes her experience to Callum, who realises that even though he is given the same opportunities as the Cross students, he will always be seen as different, and he is thus symbolically castrated as he enters the state of the
"reformed, recognizable Other" (Bhabha, "OMM" 126). He is reformed in the sense that he is deemed good enough to be able to gain entrance to Heathcroft, in contrast to the noughts who failed the entrance exam, but due to the colour of his skin, he also becomes the Other, which means that he is never fully accepted. In addition, Callum finds it difficult to grasp that he is seen as different, as he does not identify his skin colour as a marker of his identity: "I couldn’t help being white, any more than he [Mr Jason] could help being black. I mean, he wasn’t even that black anyway. He was more beige than brown, and a very light beige at that" (Blackman 134).

Nevertheless, for Mr. Jason, Callum becomes an unpleasant reminder of mimicry as he persists with his rebellious behaviour, which Mr Jason sees as insolence, and it can be argued that Callum threatens a deeper authority and upsets the boundary between coloniser and colonised. As a nought student at Heathcroft, Callum represents the civilised colonial subject, which has been molded in the Cross's colonisers' image. Accordingly, by not conforming, Callum can be said to personify the failure of the Cross authority as he is willing to attend a Cross school, but refuses to accept the vision of history which ignores the noughts.

Ferguson argues that it is first when the colonial imitation "threatened to become excessive and uncontrolled" (553), that the authoritarian rule is questioned and unsettled. This is further exemplified as the argument between Callum and Mr Jason continues. In an attempt to avert any further disobedient behaviour, Mr Jason sends Callum to the Headmaster's office. However, while he is waiting outside, he overhears a discussion between another teacher, Mrs Paxton, and the Headmaster regarding the treatment of the noughts in the school and Callum realises that the Headmaster will not do anything to stop the abuse: "If the blankers
are finding it tough here, then maybe they should go elsewhere" (Blackman 139). The Headmaster's use of the abusive term 'blanker' further cements the view existing in the postcolonial society where the colour of the skin becomes the determining factor (Haney Lopéz 965). Furthermore, Wilkie-Stibbs argues that "[i]t is an example of old-style colonialism displaced in the contemporary setting" (*Outside Child* 131-132), and that the systematic injustices expressed by Mr Jason and the Headmaster is what leads to Callum's disillusionment.

For Callum, the internal struggle between his own identity, created by his own, lived experiences, and the collective identity, which he shares with other noughts, is evident as he debates how the history teacher feels about him and he deliberates whether or not he should see every Cross as an enemy: "But Mrs Paxton wasn't my enemy. And Sephy certainly wasn't . . . I wasn't sure of anything any more" (Blackman 147-148). Mrs Paxton takes pity on Callum and tells him that the main reason that Mr Jason treats him so poorly is because his mother was a nought. When confronted, Mr Jason answers that "[e]very time I look at you, I thank God I'm not one of you. D'you hear me? I thank God" (Blackman 157). Thus, it becomes difficult for Callum to maintain his standpoint as an equal, as he realises that the colour of his skin becomes the defining factor for how Mr Jason sees him, but, as Morrison argues, "[r]ace has become metaphorical - a way of referring to and distinguishing forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than 'race' ever was" (63). This notion is interesting in relation to *Noughts & Crosses* as it is later revealed that Margaret's grandfather was a Cross (398), thus giving Callum the same rights of belonging to the dominant group as Mr Jason, in terms of heritage, if not in skin colour.
Moreover, the view of skin colour as the dividing factor is also present in the nought community. According to Haney Lopéz, the difference can be larger within the same racial groups than between two separate races, as exemplified at the novel's turning point, which takes place at Dundale, a shopping centre favoured by Crosses. When Callum tells his family that he is going there, Jude insists that he must stay away: "'Don't go there, Callum,' Jude told me, pointedly. 'But...' And only then did I click. The liberation Militia were planning something at the Dundale" (Blackman 196). Instead, he rushes to the shopping centre in order to save Sephy and ends up dragging her out of one of the shops and outside just before a bomb explodes.

Later on, DNA-evidence found on a can of pop makes it clear that it is his brother who is responsible for the bomb, but their father, Ryan, ends up taking the blame, as he feels responsible for being the one who handed the can to Jude. As a result, he is arrested. For Callum, this means that he becomes guilty by association, which causes him to be suspended from Heathcroft as it "would serve everyone's best interests" (Blackman 253). When questioning the decision and referring to how the other two nought students, who were left, have either left the school or become expelled, the headmaster replies that the girl "was expelled for gross misconduct" (Blackman 253).

At this point, it can be argued that Callum begins to explore the "collective 'one true self'" (Hall, "CID" 435) as he takes a stance for the unequal treatment of the nought students compared to the Cross students. As he questions the Headmaster's decision regarding the expulsion of another nought student, Callum also raises the issue that noughts and Crosses are seen as different:
'Shania only slapped Gardner Wilson because he hit her first', I shouted at him. 'And everyone knows that, including you. How come Shania gets expelled and Gardner gets away with a telling off? Why isn't it gross misconduct when a Cross does it?'. (Blackman 254)

As the headmaster refuses to discuss the matter, Callum decides to leave the room and slams the door in the process, something which leads to the headmaster insisting that Callum comes back in, but he keeps on walking. Here, it can be argued that Callum abandons his support of the colonisers by his rejection of mimicry. As he leaves the school, he no longer allows himself to be controlled by the dominant Crosses and his identity is formed without requiring the contextual framework they defined: "I wasn't part of his school any more. I didn't have to do what he said. I wasn't part of the whole Cross way of life" (Blackman 255).

According to Hall, the struggle for an identity is an ongoing process which can never be completed and he states that "[t]here is always 'too much' or 'too little - an overdetermination or lack, but never a proper fit, a totality" ("Introduction: Who Needs Identity", hereafter "WNI", 3). This idea can be explained in Callum's rejection of his education as he leaves Heathcroft. Due to challenging an authority, in this case the headmaster of Heathcroft, Callum is oppressed and labelled a criminal: "I'm guilty until my dad's proven innocent? Is that the way it works?" (Blackman 253). He reluctantly accepts the judgment of the Headmaster and as Callum leaves the school, he begins to explore the role of the subjugated nought, thus following the footsteps of his family as he begins to inadvertently share the same view as his brother and father.
In contrast, Lynette refuses to accept her role and in a lucid moment she decides to commit suicide because she feels that "I don’t want to live in a world where what I am isn’t good enough, where nothing I do will ever be good enough because I’m a nought and I always will be and nothing will ever change that" (Blackman 168). For Callum this comes as a shock and he resolves to not give up in the same way as Lynette did, thus not fully accepting a subjugated role, despite beginning to realise the way he is perceived by the society around him.

Society's view is evident during his father's trial, when the Cross prosecutor asks Callum about his opinions regarding the Liberation Militia in order to discredit him and, by association, discredit his father. It is implied by the prosecutor that Callum, as a nought and the son of a suspected terrorist, is a member of the Liberation Militia and despite his denial, his answer becomes confused: "'I... any organization which promotes equality between noughts and Crosses is...' My mind went blank. I was starting to panic inside. What should I do now? 'Noughts and Crosses should be equal,' I tried again. 'I support anyone who tries to bring that about’" (Blackman 267-268).

As Callum insists that no one in his family belongs to the Liberation Militia, and that no one knew about the bomb at the shopping centre, the prosecutor shows the court footage from a video surveillance camera, which clearly shows that Callum is dragging Sephy towards the exit, "'[a]lthough you couldn't hear what was being said, it was obvious that all I wanted to do was to get her out of there’" (Blackman 271). The atmosphere in the courtroom makes Callum realise that he is seen as different, and he is once again compared to blankers. However, despite being treated this way, he refuses to acknowledge that he is worth less than anyone else, and his story is backed up by a Cross police officer who heard the discussion
between Callum and Sephy as he drags her out of the shopping centre (Blackman 279). Here, it becomes clear to Callum that he is at the mercy of the Crosses and that his word is worthless, despite him having done nothing wrong and he begins to identify with the cause of the Liberation Militia.

In Callum's own opinion, he is equal to the Crosses, but in the eyes of society, he is not. As a result of this realisation, he has a recurring nightmare about being buried alive, which would mean that he fully accepts an inferior role: "It was a coffin. And once I realised that, I stopped struggling and just waited to die. That's what terrified me the most. I stopped struggling and waited to die" (Blackman 282). Bearing that in mind, it is the notion of giving up the struggle for equality that frightens Callum the most, and as a result, his identity keeps fluctuating between a subjugated colonised subject and a person on equal terms to the coloniser.

According to Wilkie-Stibbs, Blackman uses the novel as a way to criticise the binary views in society, and she claims that Noughts & Crosses "shows the black power elite's resolve to keep power in its own hands at all costs through the ruthless pursuit of regressive law-and-order policies that define the 'out-group' conditions for an excluded and dispensable minority" (Outside Child 133). Furthermore, these binaries also add to the deconstruction of "the premises on which a set of its unexamined, imperialist assumptions have rested: of ethnic divisions, of the 'West' versus 'the Rest', and, residually, . . . of the individual citizen versus the State" (Wilkie-Stibbs, Outside Child 133-134).

It is these divisions which become clear at the execution of Ryan, and it is here that Callum begins to identify with the collective nought identity in earnest. As Callum shares the experience with the other noughts around him, he also
realises that the noughts and Crosses who have come as spectators to the execution are being kept apart, not only mentally, but also through physical barriers:

We were penned in and had to stand up like cattle; they had seats. We were herded in through a side gate and ushered to our part of the courtyard. The Crosses got to drive in and sit down, like they were having a night out at the ballet or going to the cinema or something. Each one of us was scanned and searched. I bet not a single Cross was even stopped.

And then they wondered why we hated them so much (Blackman 295).

At this point, Callum is fully rejecting any claim he has made regarding being equal and it is possible to argue that the discovery and identification with the collective nought identity is what causes him to join the Liberation Militia. This discovery of the collective self can, according to Hall, act as a trigger and it is also an important part in any postcolonial struggle ("CID" 435). However, it is important to note that even though Callum decides to join the extremist group because he feels that his future has been ruined, he finds that he fits in: "It wasn't what I'd planned for myself a couple of years ago, but at least I'd stopped drifting. At last, I belonged" (Blackman 324). Moreover, by joining the militia Callum becomes the stereotypical image of the nought which he refused to identify with when he was still a student at Heathcroft and thus considered himself equal to the Crosses.

In order to prove his allegiance to the organisation, Callum is tasked with the kidnapping of Sephy. By doing so, Callum not only moves away from wanting
equality, he also performs the ultimate act of challenging authority by kidnapping the daughter of the Prime Minister. Furthermore, he identifies with the people in the Liberation Militia and as he accepts that there are differences between the two groups, he even uses the pejorative term 'dagger' when talking to Sephy: "'You wouldn’t be the first dagger I’ve killed. Not by a long shot.’ ‘And I’d be easy to kill, wouldn’t I?’ Sephy said quietly. ‘'Cause I don’t count. I’m nothing. Just a black dagger bitch. Just like you’re a white blanker bastard'" (Blackman 365). The boy who tried to answer the teachers’ questions correctly is gone and as Callum is no longer in the vicinity of Crosses, as he was at Heathcroft, his identity shifts in order to fit in with the Liberation Militia.

The need for Callum to shift identity can be explained by Mbembe's notion of the public spaces as he claims that if there are various public spaces, then the postcolonial subject "has to learn to bargain in this conceptual marketplace" (120). In addition, these individuals have the ability to be flexible in when and how they use their identity; "they are constantly undergoing mitosis, whether in 'official' space or not" (Mbembe 120). It is therefore possible to argue that Callum is undergoing mitosis in order to fit into a group where the demands are different, and, as such, has not fully discovered his own identity.

At the end of the novel, Callum's identity has, once again, shifted and despite him not being as naïve as he was before his father's execution, he moves away from the collective self and instead focuses on his own experience, thus proving Hall’s idea that cultural identity is something which is constantly changing, rather than a static concept based on a single experience ("CID" 435). For Callum, the defining part of his identity begins to take shape during the time that Sephy is kidnapped, when he has a sexual encounter with her and she becomes pregnant.
This is later on referred to by Mr Hadley as a rape and he uses this in order to petition for Callum's execution. However, Mr Hadley offers Callum a deal if he admits to having kidnapped and raped Sephy, and Callum challenges him by asking if it is "just the thought of Sephy and I having a child together that you can't stand, or is it all the mixed-race children in general?" (Blackman 427). Again, his identity shifts and he begins to see himself as being on equal terms with Mr Hadley and, by extension, the Prime Minister and the Cross authority. It is never clear what Callum's final answer to Mr Hadley is, but it is implied that he turns him down and that this final act of defiance is what finally seals his fate, as he is executed.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how Callum's actions in *Noughts & Crosses* are used to oppose the authoritarian postcolonial society. Blackman's intentional reversal of the power structures in society, as well as the alternate history, lends itself well to the study of postcolonialism as the chapters are alternating between both sides, a Cross in Sephy and a nought in Callum, but for the purposes of this study, the focus has been placed solely on Callum and his development. The creation of his identity, and thus his Bildung, was explained with the assistance of postcolonial theory, primarily the concepts of mimicry, cultural identity, language and race.

At first glance, it might seem as though the four concepts, mentioned above, are different and separate, but these are not static concepts and, as such, they can all be connected. Bhabha's notion of mimicry has been used to explain Callum's
view of himself in relation to the Crosses around him, but also to clarify the existing view among Crosses that noughts are less worthy. As he passes the entrance exam and is offered a place at Heathcroft High School, Callum begins to question his own identity as he sees himself as equal, but many of the other students, and even the Headmaster, do not share this view. This is evident when he overhears the Headmaster using the derogatory term 'blanker', which both shocks and outrages Callum. According to wa Thiong'o, language can be used for subjugation and Ashcroft claims that it is the discourse of the word that determines whether or not it can be deemed to be derogatory (279). In *Noughts & Crosses*, Callum constantly struggles to fit in, and his view of himself begins to break as Sephy shouts the word 'blanker' in order to stop the abuse that the nought students suffer on their first day of school. At this point, Callum distances himself from other noughts and enables the colonial rule (Bhabha, "OMM" 126), thus connecting the concept of language to mimicry and subjugation.

Furthermore, Callum's view of himself has been connected to Hall's understanding of cultural identity as a composite of two entities which are connected and dependent on past and present ("CID" 435). For Callum, the individual identity takes precedence over the collective self, and even though this image begins to slip as he joins the Liberation Militia in an effort to fit in, it is created anew when he realises that Sephy is pregnant. Here, Mbembe's thought of how the individual in a postcolonial society is constantly "undergoing mitosis" (120) has been used to explain Callum's shift in identity. At this point, despite Callum no longer being a mimic, in the sense that he camouflages himself in order to fit in, he considers himself to be equal to the Crosses, something which is exemplified in the way he speaks to the Prime Minister at the end of the novel.
Ultimately, Callum's actions do not see him colonised, nor does he become a fully subjugated subject, unlike his mother. Rather, he moves in the public space (Mbembe 119) and adapts to the situation, and his development is clear throughout the novel. However, as he develops, he also finds a balance between mimicry and subjugation, which upsets the power structure and it can be argued that it is his final attempt at equality which sees him executed.
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