

**Lessons in Geography  
International Conference  
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mac Birmingham**

**Abstract**

Title: *Black Pearl (Precious Little Girl)*.<sup>1</sup>  
Authors: Dr Bharti Parmar and Dr Christine Checinska (UK)

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When the Empire Windrush passengers disembarked at Tilbury Docks in June 1948, they brought their history, their culture *and* their style with them. On settlement, carefully staged studio photographs with props like a camera or a sewing machine, sent home from the Mother Country spoke of newly acquired status, of achievement, of aspiration. The formality of their dress bore traces of a process of Creolisation borne out of the crucible of plantation slavery.<sup>2</sup>

One such accessory is the multi-stranded pearl necklace worn by Christine Checinska's mother, at once a marker of Englishness, femininity and class. This presentation takes a studio photograph of her as a departure point from which to discuss colonial Caribbean perspectives of England and the English.

Throughout this discussion, Bharti Parmar explores metaphors of acculturation through the poetics of the pearl. Reflecting upon motifs such as 'mother', 'irritant' and 'journeying', parallels are made between the formation of the pearl as a foreign body trapped within a shell and the creation of the Creolised cultural expressions of the formerly enslaved.

This joint interdisciplinary presentation by a writer and an artist contributes, through both its content and its unique performative methodology, to debates central to the themes of those identified in *Lessons in Geography*.

Tags; the ocean, exoticism and cultural association, identity, fashion and acculturation.

Words 231.

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<sup>1</sup> Reggae song by Horace Faith 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Creolisation was a cultural process that took place within Caribbean plantation society characterized by tensions and flows between its dominant and subordinate members.

## BLACK PEARL

Sonny Charles & The Checkmates, Ltd.

Black pearl, precious little girl  
Let me put you up where you belong  
Black pearl little girl  
You been in the background much too long  
You been working so hard your whole life through  
Tendin' other people's houses  
Raisin' up their children too  
Hey how about something for me and you  
Here in my arms you're gonna reign supreme  
No more servin' baby  
They're gonna serve my queen  
It's our turn for happiness and our day has come  
Living for each other answering to no one

Black pearl precious little girl  
Let me put you up where you belong  
Because I love you  
Black pearl pretty little girl  
You been in the background much too long  
Together we'll stand so straight and so tall  
Created by love to love one and all  
Hey heart to heart soul to soul  
No other one could ever take your place  
My world is built around  
The very smile that's on your face  
You'll never win a beauty show  
No they won't pick you  
But you're my miss America  
I love you

## Biographies

Dr Christine Checinska (London)

Christine Checinska's work is situated at the meeting point between contemporary art, fashion and textiles. She writes about the relationship between cloth, culture and race. She is currently a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of East London.

She holds a BA (Hons) in Fashion/Textile Design from the University of the West of England, (1986), and an MA in Fashion and Communication from the University for the Creative Arts, (2002). Her PhD, *Colonizin' in Reverse: the Creolised Aesthetic of the Windrush Generation*, was awarded by Goldsmiths Centre for Cultural Studies, (2009).

She has completed a number of curatorial projects for Iniva (the Institute for International Visual Art, London). Most recently, (2011-2012), she was Associate Curator and Exhibitions Researcher for the touring show *Social Fabric*.

Dr Bharti Parmar (Birmingham)

Bharti Parmar is an artist and academic with a professional practice of 20 years. Her work is about the intersections between art and craft and is informed by the poetics of museological objects.

She studied Fine Art at the Royal College of Art and her PhD (2009, University of Wolverhampton) is entitled *A Grammar of Sentiment: Thinking about Sentimental Jewellery Towards Making New Art About Love and Loss*.

She was recently shortlisted for the Celeste Prize in Rome (2012) and exhibited in *Shakti, Contemporary Art Responses to Historic South Asian Collections* at Kedleston Hall, commissioned by Meadow Arts (2013). She was a Board Member for **mac** during its £15M redevelopment project.

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