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Citation:

Tate, S (2016) Nadinola and Glutathione: Refining and advancing a dangerous practice. In: Skin Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones: Shade Shifters. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 87-114. ISBN 9781137498441 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-49846-5>

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## **Chapter 4**

### **Nadinola and Glutathione: Refining and advancing a dangerous practice**

#### **Introduction**

One of the important things that we should not lose track of is that skin bleaching/lightening/toning is big, international business. One aspect of this business is branding, brands becoming transgenerational household names and brands becoming global through advertising. However, bleaching products are not 'happy' objects (Ahmed, 2010) of 'post-race' neo-liberal racialization because they cannot erase the problematics of Fanon's (1986) colonial psyche, or the inequities of continuing colourism and racism, or the affective nature of skin. Within racialized gender libidinal economies bleaching products continue to have unhappy psychic and social lives riven by politico-cultural and societal contestation. As such they are 'cruel' (Berlant 2006) products as they are not only subject to potential mis-readings by non-bleachers at structural and ideological levels but they constitute body risk. Further, the skin value promised by skin lightening products makes the skin conform to colourist and racist norms and ideologies that devalue darker Black skin which continues its psychic life as lack.

The chapter will look at the marketing of the brand Nadinola in newspapers and magazines in the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and online as well as Glutathione ads online. The discussion does not rehash the excellent work already done on the marketing by major multinational cosmetics companies like Nivea, Shiseido and L'Oreal who sell their bleaching products globally (Mire, 2001, Glenn, 2009; Thomas, 2009; Hunter, 2011). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are more ways to 'luminous', 'even' skin tone than ever before with some companies claiming that their products are suitable

for all 'ethnicities'- the euphemism for 'races' in our 'post-race' world. However, historically Nadinola with ammoniated mercury and hydroquinone and now also available in a hydroquinone free formula has been sold transracially and trans-generationally as we will see below. It then is a brand which has leapt the racial divide and gone back again. Thus, it has historically been impossible to racially brand it as Black even whilst that market is its mainstay.

There is a discursive divide here between those who use 'science' in producing their products to refine the practice of skin shade transformation through technological advancement and those at local level who are seen to be engaged in producing and/or marketing risky, under the counter products that are a threat to both bodies and national health systems. Glutathione, the latest in skin lightening technology will be looked at here again because of it claims to enable bleachers 'to never be Black again'. If one can 'never be Black again' this has implications for 21<sup>st</sup> century Blackness itself. Thus, the chapter moves to engage with the academy's 'death of the essential Black subject' by asking who occupies that subject position in contemporary 'post-race' times in terms of skin shade and what skin shade transformation does in regard to that idea. It concludes by looking at the (im) possibilities of change to colourism through skin lightening which in its very performance reinstates lighter skin shade preference divides but with a difference. This difference is produced by what Black Nationalists and those invested in the politics of brownness would call '(in)authentic', 'fake', as now that preference can be brought into being on the surface of the body through skin lightening. This skin's (in)authenticity is what gives it a critical edge as it transgresses the shade inequality of the Black social skin. First, let us now turn to look at transracial skin lightening and Nadinola.

## **Marketing skin lightening transracially globally: Nadinola**

Both Glutathione and Nadinola are bleaching brands, the latter is a registered company brand and the former a name of a bleaching product. Brands are cultural forms within markets that are a reflection of the product marketer 'imagining the consumer' (Lury, 2004; 7). As brands, Nadinola and Glutathione are something

to which some feeling or action is directed; [the brand] is an object-ive in that it is the object of "a purpose or intention," or even a whole series of purposes [...] [T]he brand is not a closed object, but is, rather, open, extending into—or better, implicating—social relations. It is some-thing that is identifiable in its doing (Lury 2004, 1).

Nadinola and Glutathione sell the idea that by 'consuming scientifically produced cosmetics one can assume a cosmopolitan, upper-class look that makes one desirable and modern' (The Modern Girl Around The World Research Group, 2008: 41). As brands, Nadinola and Glutathione are also embedded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century social relations of (post)colonialism, continuing racism in 'post-race' states, 'post-race' aesthetics in which ideas of 'choice', freedom and 'enhancement' are paramount and colourism within Black Atlantic aesthetic politics. They are part of the production and contestation of local and Black Atlantic racial formations as capitalism creates and transmits ideas of femininity, 'race' and respectability through ads (Thomas, 2008). Ads also transmit ideologies of skin shades' political, economic, aesthetic, affective social and cultural value. As brands these products construct the identification 'bleacher' at the same time as they transform identifications, for example from beautiful to ugly, from darker-skinned to 'browning', from under-class to potential middle class. These bleaching brands engage 'race' performativity (Butler 1993; Tate 2005) as well

as produce both positive and negative affects. These affects circulate within the diaspora's aesthetic racialized gender libidinal economies. When these brands are applied on the skin, consumed orally/anally, or taken intravenously or become a household name this brings the consumer, the bleacher, into view, into being. Until the point of the skin being transformed their use is not known. The bleacher exists within another affective plane. That is, within the affective precarity of exposure as said above. Here, exposure as a bleacher through skin change can transport positive or negative affects depending on who makes that judgement and also the impact of the bleaching agent on the skin itself.

In South Africa for example, Lynn M. Thomas (2009) tells us that the evidence of skin lightening product use, the *chubabas* (dark purple patches of skin on cheeks and under the eyes) on the epidermis, signals someone up to date and modern. However, to a dermatologist or a Black Nationalist this would be a sign of harm at best and, at worst, of internalized colonial Black hatred. Skin lightening products still continue to come up against existing discourses on racist aesthetics and neo-liberal racialization that dictate that we can all change our skin colour in terms of the latter and the view that 'light' or 'white' is still right as in colonial times in terms of the former. This discourse is hard-wired into societal structures within the Black Atlantic diaspora and enables the continuation of the Racial Contract (Mills, 1997) in that only those skins which are 'right' have any aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social value. Further, only skins that are 'right' can produce any surplus value for nations or indeed individuals - think, for example, of the selling of the *mulata* body in sex tourism in the Dominican Republic or the darker skinned Rastafarian male 'rent a dread' in Jamaica's 'romance tourism'. In terms of this latter we need only consult work on marriage and

other intimate pairings and success in the labour market (Keith, 2009; Thompson, 2009) to remember that the skin you inhabit matters!

Cosmetics including skin lighteners 'are an intriguingly literal manifestation of what Michel Foucault termed a "technology of the self" as this resonates with our contemporary practices of bodily enhancement through artifice' (Thomas, 2009:189). For Foucault individuals can resist normalization through effecting operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being by themselves or with the help of others and, through these, transform themselves so as to live a better life (Thomas, 2009). This point of view shows that individuals are imbricated both within structures and sociality as well as being impacted on by them. Following the Foucaultian perspective illustrates that individuals can resist the hold of global white supremacy on their psyches which is seen by some as the source of the surge in skin lightening and also build communities of skin lighteners who are connected globally through the to and fro of products such as Nadinola and Glutathione, bodies, aesthetic politics and skin knowledge across the Atlantic.

We have already seen the centrality of Nadinola's place in the skin bleacher's beauty arsenal in Jamaica from the TVJ documentary. The *Jamaica Star* ran an article written by its staff reporter Leighton Williams in which the headline 'Big Buck\$ From "Bleach"' shows us that skin bleaching is also about profit as much as it is about aesthetics and reframing the colonial colour line still in existence in the Black Atlantic. The article states

Vendors do good business with the selling of bleaching creams, such as yellow and white Nadinola, Ambi and Neoprosone. The creams, especially the

Nadinola have opened a wide market for the vendors, so much so that most of them have discarded their other goods and are selling them only.

(Jamaica-star.com/the star/20040130/news/news1.html accessed May 14<sup>th</sup> 2105)

In the same article we are told that 'Cutie' a vendor buys a wholesale bucket of Nadinola every week at a cost of \$15,000 Jamaican. From this bucket she ties out bags each costing \$60, \$100, \$300 or \$600 and when sold with another bleaching agent the cream costs more. She makes \$30,000 Jamaican on a weekly basis, double the amount she paid wholesale.

Local vendors being able to get the wholesale bucket of Nadinola on the local market is tied to trade links and local licensing agreements. In terms of trade the site 'Duty Calculator-Import Duties and Tax Made Easy' provides HS tariff codes, import duty and taxes and restrictions for Nadinola for countries from A-Z (<http://www.dutycalculator.com/> accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015). This globally available and globally traded product has a WTO tariff sub-heading of 3304.99. The existence of Jamaican Nadinola also makes us note that this product is also manufactured locally as well and marketed as such. Given Jamaica's position as *the* site of bleaching, naming the cream *Jamaican Nadinola* gives it currency among bleachers and would-be bleachers globally. Nadinola is produced in Jamaica in Kingston and St. Thomas by E.W. Abrahams and Sons who claim it as a flagship product ([mobile.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140908/news/news22.php](http://mobile.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140908/news/news22.php) accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2105). E.W. Abrahams and Sons is a cosmetics and pharmaceuticals company with registered offices in Kingston whose top five products include the cream at second in the ranking. The product is sold locally but also exported to other CARICOM countries, Canada,

the UK and also back to the USA. Of 79 records available online Jamaican Nadinola enters the USA through Port Everglades/Fort Lauderdale, Florida destined for Armstrong Agencies Tennessee which receives 53 units of 1,433 kilograms each. (<https://panjiva.com/E-W-Abrahams-Sons-Ltd/1085096> accessed 14th May, 2015). One wonders how this company ships to the UK though when we see on [www.jamaicastores.com/nadinola-bleaching-225](http://www.jamaicastores.com/nadinola-bleaching-225) accessed 14th May, 2015) a company which also sells the Jamaican De Luxe Nadinola Skin Bleaching Cream but states 'with new verified confiscation reports out of the UK, unfortunately this product can no longer be shipped to the UK'. For Nadinola to be confiscated in the UK means that it contains banned substances. So, just what is it anyway and how did this global phenomenon begin?

The mark Nadinola was officially filed as a trademark by J. Strickland and Co, Olive Branch, MS 38654 on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1931 after he borrowed \$500 US to start the company. Before this time Nadinola Cream was advertised in the El Paso Herald in El Paso, Texas on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1910 as a beauty complexion cream which 'rids the pores and tissues of all impurities' (texashistory.unt.edu.ark:/67531/metaph/16673/m 1/2/ accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015). We can assume that at this point the cream was being marketed to white women within this outlet. A milk glass container for Nadinola Cream currently available for sale online embossed with 'Nadionola Cream: A Complexion Beautifier' was produced by the National Toilet Company in Paris, Tennessee. This company was founded in 1899 and sold the cream to white women. Alvin Tyson and Walter Johnson who were originally connected with the National Toilet Company founded Tyson and Company in 1920 in Paris Tennessee and started marketing cosmetics exclusively to Black women ([www.visitdowntownparis.com/historydp.html](http://www.visitdowntownparis.com/historydp.html)



[accessed 20th April, 2015](#)). In 1960 the National Toilet company was one of the country's oldest independent cosmetic companies having marketed a line of cosmetics and speciality soaps under the name Nadinola since 1899. Ath-O-Med which specialized in athletic medication was acquired during this period as the company became the Chattanooga Medicine Company (CMC) Network. The company saw increased interest in its products when it began the sponsorship of live shows and aired musical entertainment on the 'Black Draught-Soltice Show'. The company changed its name to Chattanooga Inc in 1976. The Nadinola skin products are still made under the Nadinola name brand by J. Strickland and Co. It is available in every retailer in the USA where 75-80% of its customers are African American and in 26 countries globally with its largest customer being Nigeria. As we saw earlier Nigeria is the conduit for bleaching products into the African continent. Indeed Nadinola is on sale online in Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, Jamaica and online at ebay, Amazon, Walmart and CVS amongst others. Indeed, one internet site ([toptalk.info/t-nadinola-skin-discoloration-fade-cream-extra-strength-formula-2-25-02-590372](http://toptalk.info/t-nadinola-skin-discoloration-fade-cream-extra-strength-formula-2-25-02-590372) accessed 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2015) provides the cost of this globally available bleaching cream in the US, China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Egypt, Canada, Iran, Turkey, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Germany, the UK, France, South Korea, Italy and Spain. We can only assume that the Nadinola on sale in EU countries will be that which is hydroquinone (HQ) free as anything else will be ceased by state authorities.

Nadinola has a long history of being marketed to both the African American and white communities in the USA. We saw some of that marketing above in the El Paso Herald's 1910 ad. Blain Roberts (2014) states that the National Toilet Company first made

whitening products for Black women and then began marketing to white women in the 1920s in urban and small town newspapers and periodicals in the Southern States. However, this account and the year of the El Paso Herald ad are different historically. Irrespective of this what is clear is that Nadinola had transracial use as we see if we look at the ads.

Dorothy Dignam from the Chicago based McJunkin Advertising Agency established the company as a national name with mass circulation ads for women's magazines and newspapers USA-wide (Roberts, 2014). Ads for 'Nadine Face Powder' targeted Southern *white* women presenting a product specially blended to match a Southern woman's 'natural colouring' (Roberts, 2014). Ads for Nadinola Bleaching Cream, a company best seller, promised to make outdoor complexions fair again by removing discolorations, tanning and freckles (Roberts, 2014). What ads do in terms of the relationship of the brand with the consumer can be looked at through Butler's (1997a) theorization of 'excitable speech'. The content communicated by the utterance, the events or effects caused by the utterance and the act that is constituted by the utterance itself are all significant. The brand interpellates the consumer through a citation of existing conventions and, thus, inaugurates a particular subjectivity which is both recognized and recognizable as a precondition of subjecthood. The bleacher exists through both subjectivation to discourses and the address of others whether bleachers or non-bleachers or whether or not the recognition is positive. The ads' discursive conventionality, citationality and recognisability as they interpellate bleachers as consumers and community are what mark them as 'race performative'. That is, they produce subjectivities as 'raced' but also gendered, sexualized, classed and aged. 'Race' performativity within the analysis of the ads can be shorn of what the consumer as agent may intend or enunciate because it is the force of the citation of

the discourses which brings bleached subjects into being. However, discourse can be out of control, be excitable and this excitability enables difference to emerge as recognizability regimes are instantiated (Butler, 1997b). It is the 'race' performativity of gendered cosmetics advertising and its incitements to act that are significant for our purposes in these ads. This is important if we view ads as part of the technology of racialized aesthetic governmentality (Foucault, 1977) in which the ad draws us to a particular hegemonic racialized aesthetic point of view on skin as much as it issues 'orders' for action to achieve this racialized gender aesthetic. These 'orders' for action- that is buy the cream and apply it- exist within always already existing beauty ideals so need not speak ethnically or racially for the need for the cream.

It need not do this because the need is already built into the racialized gender aesthetic system. If we read this racialized gender aesthetic system through Pierre Bourdieu's (1988) 'habitus', we can see it as a socially constructed system of dispositions in which the body is embedded which generates a 'naturalized skin sense' within power relations which is not necessarily amenable to self-fashioning through skin transformation. However, it cannot stop agency. This system is known to us as intersectional subjects and orients us to act through its governmentality or to act against its hold on our psyches and actions if different ideologies and practices are known and implemented. Such subjugated knowledge on anti-skin bleaching discourses would flow, for example, from Black Nationalist politics or 'healthy Black natural skin' narratives, or medical discourses which run counter to the skin bleaching industry.

Ads for Nadinola and Nadine Face Powder from the National Toilet Company appeared in the Amarillo Globe-Times in Amarillo Texas in 1931 (July 1<sup>st</sup> page 8) and in the Afro American on March 14<sup>th</sup> of the same year. This shows that the company built a transracial customer base in the USA. The latter ad aimed at Black women stated 'DO THIS TO GET WHITER SKIN-Nadinola Bleaching Cream available at all drug stores and toilet counters'. 'Whitening the skin' was the aim then in 1931 for both Black and white women. If it wasn't available locally then all the reader had to do was send 50 cents or \$1.00 depending on the size required to the company and they would send the cream postage free. Nadine Face Powder was also marketed in the ad so Black and white women were using the same product as the 'modern girl' was called up through the illustration transracially (The Modern Girl Around The World Research Group, 2008). 'Do this' already constitutes the order of the ad if the aim was to get 'whiter' skin. How could this have been read by Black women though who did not have 'white' skin to make 'whiter' in the first place? This is an important question because we still see whitening or becoming whiter or being white still being used for shade of complexion in the Black Atlantic even though it is also known that that is an impossibility because of race's immutability so that if you are not 'white' to begin with you cannot become 'whiter'. So, if one belongs to what Charles Mills (1997) would call 'sub-persons' because of the operations of the Racial Contract 'whiteness' is impossible. Therefore, one wonders if this is part of the bleaching cream company's play on 'whiteness' which makes it a floating signifier so seemingly attainable even though one knows that as Black it is an (im)possible attainment anyway.

Perhaps it is the case that since Black people were always already assumed to want to be 'white' anyway which is a particular aesthetic epistemology of ignorance emerging from the Racial Contract, then the company could use the same ad for both Black and white consumers alike. Today we still see ads that talk about 'whitening', 'brightening' and 'lightening' the skin as properties of Nadinola. From a 21<sup>st</sup> century standpoint we could see the words as speaking trans-racially to its various consumers around the world for whom the aim of bleaching would be different. What do we do though with Jamie (TVJ, 2013) that we saw in the last chapter speaking about being 'dark' one minute and 'white' the next when he describes his bleaching process? We must remember that 'whiten' is not 'white' if you are Black. It is about lightness and also a parsing of a Jamaican 'whiteness' which is lighter skinned Arab, 'mixed race', Chinese, for instance, rather than European or Anglo-American 'whiteness'. Thus, we can see that 'white' takes on different nuances in Black Atlantic sites (Tate and Law, 2015a) now as it undoubtedly did in the 1930s USA.

The ad also instructs its readers about how to get the product if it was not available locally. This scarcity allied with ease of access might have made the product seem more attractive, more exclusive, innovative, rare, as not everyone had it. These are some of the effects of the ad at the level of creating desire for the product if one wanted to fashion oneself as lighter skinned because darker skin was constructed as less attractive. Becoming lighter through the application of the product produces pleasure both in terms of skin colour change and in one's capacity to use this latest, exclusive, skin lightening technology. There is a prescription to 'Do this to get lighter skin' not just in imagination towards lighter skin as the desired imaginary object but as an objective

with all of its racial attachments and affective as well as political entanglements. This is so as there is also a prescription for export from desired object in the imagination to the actual object of the cream as brand linked to the objective of lightening itself.

In the Evening Independent of February 29<sup>th</sup> 1924, readers were told 'FOR YOUR SKIN'S SAKE- Nadine is the individual, distinctive face powder of white Southern women. The first time you try it you will know that Nadine is for *your* skin, *your* coloring. It brings that peach bloom softness, the warm colortone, the youthful freshness and transparency'. White Southern women who bleached and powdered put on 'white face' so came into being through a product perhaps aimed initially at a Black market. In the South because of enslavement, colouring and skin colour had heightened significance for white Southern women. To already proclaim Nadinola's companion powder as racialized technology for creating and maintaining Southern feminine whiteness on the skin as 'freshness and transparency' means that artifice was known as one method of maintaining white supremacy through the skin, though this artifice had to appear 'natural'.

Indeed, Nadine enabled the maintenance of a peaches and cream complexion, youthful and transparent skin clearly prized by white Southern women at that time. Nadine performatively produced this white racialized skin on application. White Southern skin both separates her from Northern white women and from Black-white 'mixed race' and Black Southern women who might also use Nadine. White Southern women are implored to use Nadine 'for your skin's sake' which speaks directly to them as a specific racialized and aesthetic skin category. The performative enactments of

this ad are constituted by two things. The first is to establish the Southern white woman as a racial gender category and racialized subject and then to interpellate her into the positionality of user of Nadine as *the* face powder for white Southern women. The second is to construct the Southern white women's peaches and cream complexion as a specific white skin category. The ad performatively brings into view white skin as various and multiple rather than the white constructed homogeneity of Black skin. This ad, as is the case for other Nadinola ads, does an enormous amount of white 'race' work for people racialized as white within a 'whiteness' which is a deeply engrained way of being in and seeing the world (Yancy 2008; 2012). Such whiteness is not the cause of shame, so ads for bleaching cream sold to white women would not unsettle white privilege to the extent of putting the viewer in the location of shamed and shameful because of skin colour privilege. Shamelessness on the part of these women is enabled by ads such as these which do not censure because of lack in terms of the ideal which ensures that white skin privilege continues unabated. The ad's presentation of the non-necessity for shame implies that just the mere application of the powder is all that is needed to be the ideal Southern belle. Racialized white skin continues in the world free from exculpation which we see is not the case if we look at a selection of ads for Nadinola in *Ebony* and *Jet* from the 1950's to the 1960's.

From the 1950's until the 1960's Nadinola bleaching cream was marketed extensively in *Ebony* magazine and it is to these that we now turn to look at how they performatively bring the Black woman's bleached skin as beautiful and its wearer as successful and modern, into being in the space of the ad. This is done through not just the model chosen who epitomizes 'the modern girl' but, drawing from Butler (1997a),

through constitutive acts within the ad itself. In Ebony December 1959, for example, the lighter skinned, straight-haired model already sets up the beauty standard through the body itself. As ideal she says to her reading audience 'I've enough bottles, tubes and jars to beautify the sphinx- but this is the only one that counts NADINOLA BLEACHING CREAM'. My eye keeps going back to 'beautify the sphinx', because it seems as if the sphinx is being positioned as an impossibility in terms of beautification or only as a possibility with a full arsenal of beauty products. The sphinx itself is made from brown stone, has a lion's tail and rear end and the claws of a lion at the front. The sphinx is at once inanimate object, ugly and part animal which is already entering into the arena of mythologized impossible animal/human combinations. I wonder what was at the forefront of the advertiser's mind when that comparison was being drawn between a Black woman's skin/body and that of the partially animal sphinx? Could it be that the link is that the sphinx is incapable of beautification because it is darker skinned and it is animalistic much as the Black woman has been discursively constructed in the Black Atlantic? If we look at Carole Pateman and Charles Mills' (2007) work we can see that Black women anchor the very bottom of the social gender and racial contracts and are not even 'subcontractors' in the way that Black men can be or that white women most certainly are within hetero-patriarchy. This genders Fanon's historico-racial schema and racial epidermal schema in very specific ways because alongside the 'tom-toms, slave ships and cannibalism' there is also the impossibility of feminine beauty which is not white being set in train. Or at the very least an impossibility of beauty and civility that is not lighter skinned. Being incapable of beautification by the many potions and creams like the sphinx makes Black women's skin a zone of shamefulness which only Nadinola can alleviate. Shame emerges through critical appraisal of darker skin and self-censure at darkness on the



skin as an inherent flaw within a white supremacist framework in which Black womanhood lacks privilege.

To continue this line of argumentation lighter skin is both a mark of civilization and bodily beauty. Thus, very much like bleachers in Ghana today bleaching creams were a way into modernity, civility and glamour for Black women who bleached in the 1950s and pre-Black Power 1960s. The content of the utterance then reproduces the cream as the only one that counts because it is the only one that can beautify the Black woman's skin through its bleaching effect. It is the only cream that can lead to civility and modernity because of its use as skin lightening technology and the only one that can (re)produce civility, modernity and glamour on and through the skin. Through the selective distancing from darker skin and the exclusive association with the bleaching cream, Nadinola is produced as the only brand or product that is effective. It is constituted as the brand leader in skin bleaching creams as beautifying aids in which skin bleaching is not presented as a form of subordination to whiteness or even as a part of that schema. Rather, it is as if Black women are speaking intimately to themselves about that peculiar intra-racial subordination- colourism. This intimate speaking without censure within a feminine aesthetic culture in which many creams have been tried and none have worked produces a metonymic community of skin bleachers. A community of bleachers mutually attracted to the ad because they all know what failure is about and are willing to try something new in order to succeed in skin lightening. Nadinola is the only cream that counts, it is the only one that makes a difference in skin lightening is the message here which has the effect of establishing Nadinola as brand leader and object of desire if one wants to be lighter skinned and

maintain that look through its continuous application. This ad establishes Nadinola as *the only choice* in a market of cosmetics which do not work well and, thus, encourages the reader to buy the product. Its performative force lies in its encouragement to 'buy and apply' in order to attain the desired skin, to look like the ideal. Of course, we could also see the reference to the Sphinx as the 'subversive idea of Black Egypt as the archetype of civilization at its most beautiful and advanced [...] an idea popularized [...] by the Harlem Renaissance' (The Modern Girl Around The World Research Group, 2008: 44). This interpretation places Nadinola as a product of racial pride and subversion of Euro-American racial hierarchies.

Page 24 of the March 1960 issue of Ebony had a special introductory half-price sale for Nadinola at \$1.00 accompanied with a picture of a lighter skinned and straight haired 'modern girl' model. Here we also see shaming and shamefulness within ads for this product as skin imperfections in terms of colour-dark, dull complexion;- and texture-big pores, blackheads, oiliness- are allied to life problems- lack of romance- and personality defects-'lack of charm'. Readers with these skin defects, which I would locate as part of the 'controlling skin images' which existed then and continues now within society, are already being interpellated as people with a problem which the cream can solve. This sale of 'THE BIGGEST BEAUTY VALUE you ever saw' was 'to introduce a new *family sized* jar of Nadinola De Luxe Bleaching Cream... that contains enough of this famous complexion-clearing cream to last three persons at least a month! (Or one person at least three months!)'. We are told to

'Chase away those bad complexion blues! Don't let a dull, dark complexion rob you of romance. Don't let big pores, blackheads, oily skin cheat you of

charm. Don't let a poor complexion make you look older than you are. Try NADINOLA Bleaching Cream and see your skin become lovelier *fast!*

CONTAINS WONDER-WORKING A-M! This remarkable complexion-clearing ingredient enables NADINOLA De Luxe to penetrate the skin cells to work *within* the skin to cleanse and clear, brighten and lighten, smooth and soften. Nothing, absolutely *nothing* will improve your skin so many ways as NADINOLA! TEENAGERS TOO- NADINOLA De Luxe *with A-M* is especially effective for teenage complexion troubles- a real boon to sensitive boys and girls'

This ad relates *Nadinola Deluxe* to scientific advancement by claiming that it penetrates the skin cells. It links skin directly to life and to readers' skin, intimate and personality desires. Nadinola sets up imaginings through the ad of 'a new you' which comes through the skin- as one lightens one is reborn through the (re)birth of the skin. The 'new you' is the subjectivity which is being inaugurated here. Skin problems, one of which is being dark, are set up here as the source of life problems which the cream can solve. Applying the problem solver cream, lightening the skin, improving your complexion makes you younger, smoother, more even skin-toned which can change your life. These claims made for what the product does to the skin seem very similar to those made today. Cynically, 'wonder working a-m' is presented as the skin bleaching panacea which penetrates the cells. Making ammoniated mercury sound like science had been applied to the cream was immoral because it was known at that time that this chemical was harmful to the skin. To call such a chemical 'wonder working a-m', occludes such harm and shows the lack of ethics when it is about the company's bottom-line.

This point of view is further compounded when we see that in this ad Nadinola has already set its sights on the teenage market for its 'complexion clearer' which cleansed, brightened and lightened the skin for 'sensitive boys and girls'. The cross-generational use theme that Nadinola went on to produce later with a cream called 'Generations' clearly extends from this and its need to capture a segment of the teenage market for lighteners. The use of 'sensitive' might not have been effective within this market but if we think instead about parents buying products for their teenagers and parents being more likely to read the ads then we get a different perspective on 'sensitive'. Parents with children with acne hyper-pigmentation, for example, could be easily appealed to by the word 'sensitive', because to erase the cause of their child's skin concern by applying the cream might be exactly what is necessary for the child's self-esteem. Overall, trans-generational lightening through Nadinola as necessary practice is the act that is constituted by the ad. Here Nadinola begins to establish itself as a family product rather than one for just women building on the long-established habitus (Bourdieu, 1988) of taste for lighter skin and lighter skin distinction both within white supremacy and colourism.

Nadinola ads make us think about how to bend dominant taste in skin colour. The ads also make us note that one can believe that white supremacy exists, that 'Black is beautiful' but also that Black is lacking. That is the link between the psyche and the social which ads navigate by only dealing with lack at the skin level, making Black lack 'superficial', epidermal and capable of amelioration through bleaching. Indeed, the white supremacist and Black colourism aesthetic present in the ads illustrate that disgust/contempt is not necessary. Rather, what is necessary is a disposition towards

skin that is lighter which is not a symptom of white supremacy or colourism but constitutive of these two anti-darker skin positions. As such then taste for lighter skin as we see in the ads resists any rational persuasion otherwise if what is taken as necessary for feminine beauty is a 'clear, bright' complexion.

In May 1960 the page 24 of Ebony Nadinola ad reads 'Life is a whirl for the girl with a clear, bright Nadinola-light complexion'. 'Brightening' as an effect of the cream is again stressed, bleaching is never used to describe what the cream does. Such obfuscation shows that skin bleaching was already a firm part of the movement for Black anti-racist aesthetics which started in at least the 1930s in the USA (Taylor, 2000). Tracing the etymology of bright we see that in Old English (bryht) it meant 'splendid', 'clear-sounding', 'beautiful', 'divine', 'glitter'. So to 'brighten' is to illuminate, maybe even to make divine looking what is already there, in other words to enhance the skin. In Old English 'bleach' etymologically is related to (blæcan) meaning 'to whiten', in Greek (phlegen) 'to burn' and in Latin (flugrare) 'to burn'. To 'bleach' is to burn, remove darkness or stain and replace the natural with something else and if we go to Old English, something whiter. No wonder it is then that 'brighten' or 'lighten' is preferred to 'bleach' which would have also been already symbolically loaded within Black anti-racist and decolonial politics in the USA and the Black Atlantic. The ad's words accompany a lighter skinned, straighter haired, professional looking, chic, young woman on the phone speaking to 3 Black men at once which makes us think of the intimate in both its romantic and erotic modalities. As for other modern girl ads, here she is 'associated with dating, romantic love and premarital sex' (The Modern Girl Around The World Research Group, 2008: 35). Interestingly, the ad keeps racial boundaries in place and does not give a glance at the miscegenated coupling long known in US American society- the white man and the Black woman (De Vere Brody,

1998). The ad claims that the cream can make one's life a romantic and erotic whirl within the parameters of 'the race'. Reading this otherwise we could say that the ad also maintains the white beauty ideal because even when lightened the Black woman would not be attractive to white men-which as we know is absolutely incorrect historically and contemporarily. Therefore, the ad interpellates racialized subjects within the racialized gender libidinal economy of racial segregation's norms at the level of the intimate couple which is the basis of the nation (Povinelli, 2006). Transracial intimacy is not condoned. It is erased within the attachment to colourism as well as the skin bleaching cream's relation to lighter skin as attractive to the opposite sex. The ad further says

Give romance a chance! Contains wonder-working A-M. Effective but oh so gentle! Nadinola acts so positively yet is so kind to your skin that we guarantee that you will be delighted with the results. There are two types- one for oily skin and one for dry skin. Choose one type that is right for you. Buy it confidently, use it happily.

'Buy it confidently use it happily' hides the damage done to the skin by wonder working A-M. Ammoniated mercury is not gentle or kind to the skin and there might be no delight with the results. Rather, there might be despair as the skin peels, cracks and hyperpigmentation rather than 'brightness' emerges. In the face of this it is impossible to choose the type right for you whether in oily or dry skin formulations. However, the product still maintains the appliance of science in wonder-working A-M and in its oily or dry skin formulations- one type which will be 'right for you'. Since the skin is 'typed' this leads the consumer to assume that the product is scientifically individually tailored for their skin needs and there is no reason not to use the cream. In fact to not do that

is to maintain skin that has disvalues, that exist within a zone of negation that is so pervasive that the problem skin which is darker maintains social liminality if it is not brightened. The very term 'bright' or its verb 'brighten' when applied to the skin are problematic because they are not just descriptive actions in terms of the skin but constitute taste at the same time as they re-inscribe the deep habituation to dislike darker skin that is within colourism or white supremacy.

Romance can be guaranteed by lighter skin which is sure to bring delight even though wonder working A-M is ammoniated mercury. Nadinola in 1934 contained 10% ammoniated mercury which was enough to cause serious skin damage and remember this was being marketed to both Black and white women. In response to customer complaints the amount was lowered by the company in the late 1930s and again in the 1940s (Roberts, 2014). Today Nadinola De Luxe Bleaching Cream and Jamaican Nadinola contain 3% ammoniated mercury.

In Ebony October 1969 on page 71 there is an ad for a men's bleach called 'skin toner'. 'Toner' changes the aesthetic from 'brightening' or 'lightening'. This is a different aesthetic and affective orientation which leads to a retraining of Black heterosexual, masculine taste through habituation. That is if 'toning' is about evening out the complexion, then Black men do not bleach even though it is the same product that women use. We still see this distinction between bleaching and toning in Jamaica today in terms of class. In the assertion of 'toning' the cream erases the accusation of masculine vanity with an eye to compulsory heterosexuality or any claim that they are using a woman's product which could render them effeminate or homosexual. In fact,

the claims made in the ad are about fading blotches and leaving men 'smoother to *her* touch'. To 'fade' is not the same as to bleach which is simultaneously constructed as the feminine activity and men's heterosexuality will not be brought into question through the fading of blotches. Black hetero-patriarchy is still kept intact even when using a product which has been feminized. Men can tone and 'win the game of love' through scoring the most points with 'toned/conditioned' skin even when that product is still linked to Nadinola. The ad interpellates the Black, masculine, metrosexual subject through 'man', 'scoring points' as in sports and 'to score' in terms of sexual intimacy

Extra Points Skin Toner for Men by Nadinola- Extra Points fades dark blotches. Clears up skin. Leaves you smoother to her touch. How to win the game of love? Score the most points, man! Extra Points Skin toner/conditioner by the makers of Nadinola, National Toiletries Co, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The packaging is white with a yellow and black stripe which is echoed in the tube of cream. The ad for the toner is minimalist and does not call it 'bleach' at any point even though skin lightening had long been a cross-gender practice. Again we see the heterosexual matrix within the game of love that the cream will help men to win through clear, conditioned, smooth but not *lighter* or *brighter* skin. Black metro-sexuality has certainly been appealed to by this ad so Black men's grooming was also well advanced by this time and went beyond just the shower, hair-cut and facial hair grooming to issues of skin tone and texture. Of course, we must remember that anywhere in the world where Black people lived was a potential market place for these products as we see in the history of the marketing of skin bleaching products from the USA to South Africa (Thomas, 2008). This means that US American aesthetic skin attitudes and



ideologies were exported to these zones with the product. US imports habituated consumers to what constituted taste within the modern Black subject irrespective of gender. So even if there was a belief that this cream carried with it a white supremacist mind set which was not one's own perhaps there was not sufficient habituation to dislike bleaching and bleaching products instantiated across the Black Atlantic at this time. Further, believing in the right Black Nationalist ideology- not bleaching- is not sufficient to change taste especially if the taste maker is advertising which is available also within the magazines freely exported around the world.

In Jet 29<sup>th</sup> October 1964 on page 63 the ad for *Ultra Nadinola* for skin dis-colourations on the body read

'Discover Ultra Nadinola for a brighter, lighter, more even-toned look in all those beauty areas, Not just face and hands- but elbows, knees and other 'friction areas'. Ultra Nadinola gently fades these darker skin areas, wherever they occur, to a brighter, more even-toned look. Ultra Nadinola lightens and brightens your skin-fades dark areas and discolorations- moisturizes dry skin'.

The cream has now evolved from just a face cream to one that can be used on 'friction' problem areas on the body itself including the hands, where it removes 'deep-seated "age spots" to more even-toned, youthful looking beauty'. For us now that might well be marketed as a 'dark spot corrector' and aimed at those with lighter or white skin. The cream encourages brand loyalty and still contains the now called 'medicated ingredient' A-M. 'Medicated' sounds like medicated soap which removes bacteria as it deeply cleanses. To say the cream 'cleanses' is to imply that it removes impurities whether read as the skin colour itself, bacteria or dirt. Cleansing is a powerful claim to

make for a bleaching product as this act is something in which we all have to be involved.

No claims are being made here for 'medical' effects or necessity but the similarity is interesting as it perhaps tries to shift affective orientation to A-M by presenting the cream as something gentle, fading discolourations as it moisturizes, brightening and thereby toning the skin. Nadinola now is medicated so must be better for your skin especially if we think of the meaning of medicated which is to administer a drug or treatment. So the cream shifts from harmful cosmetic to medicine and as such we could infer that its effects have been tested and approved as non-harmful. These ads in both Ebony and Jet seem to be aimed at maintaining brand loyalty through repeated claims of the cream's effectiveness at the same time as encouraging the growth of new markets and consumers through repeated guidance or exposure to new knowledge claims- through habituation to be precise. Through the ads such habituation leads to positive feelings about the product through language, the model and the cream on display. The ads predispose consumers to identify with the brand as a miracle worker and respond to it as such in the 'real world'. They inculcate taste for Nadinola and produce skin lightening subjectivities in other words.

In Ebony October 1965 page 19 surrounded by an article on racial amalgamation in Brazil, 'Ultra Nadinola' appears as a 'Bright Idea' and continues the cream's marketing of 'brightening', 'lightening', 'toning' and 'cleansing' the skin on face and body. Again, as in past ads, 'brightening' as euphemism is a word and product action that erases the inherent ill-effects on the skin carried by hydroquinone and mercury. Its 'ultra' label

is imparted by hydroquinone with A-M still being in the 'Deluxe' and 'Regular' Nadinola formulations. There is a picture of a woman's face which progressively becomes three shades lighter prominently displayed in the ad. The ad promises that the product will make the skin 'cleaner' and 'brighter' and that its user is 'bright' for using a product which uncovers their 'natural' beauty

and bright you for discovering it, the new cosmetic skin lightener Ultra Nadinola-fades skin discolorations, lightens, brightens, makes skin cleaner, clearer. When you use Ultra Nadinola, please don't be shocked if other skin brighteners seem a trifle dull by comparison. Ultra Nadinola is that different, that effective! Its special ingredient hydroquinone, actually searches out and fades discolorations, tones up skin to a lighter, lovelier, more golden glow. Its special moisturizer helps skin feel as dewy-soft and radiant as it looks. Little wonder so many women find Ultra Nadinola a bright idea in complexion care. Ultra Nadinola uncovers the natural beauty of face, neck, hands, elbows, knees in beautiful fashion. Nadinola is available with special ingredient A-M in Deluxe and Regular formulations.

This ad for the first time mentions hydroquinone even though *De Luxe* and *Regular* Nadinola still have the special ingredient A-M. Hydroquinone is presented as a wonder ingredient produced by scientific innovation that searches out and tones skin discolorations so that your skin has a golden glow. So 'golden glow' is the preferred skin colour here- a shade of brown that can be achieved by using a very dangerous chemical all over the body where dark skin resides so that 'the natural golden glow' which all Black women have can be achieved. The cream's use then brings the golden-skinned woman that all Black women are onto the surface of the body which 'fact'

encourages women seeking this 'look' and the subjectivities emerging from being 'golden-skinned' to buy the cream.

Nadinola *HQ* has now entered the market of hydroquinone-free creams and the company has also used Nadinola *Generations* to capture new markets. Hydroquinone-free cream enables those who are sensitive to that compound or afraid of using it because of the harm it has been shown to cause for over a century, to bleach. The details of the product on Amazon are

Nadinola HQ Hydroquinone Free Skin Tone Cream For Sensitive Skin

- Nadinola Hydroquinone Free Skin Tone Cream For Sensitive Skin ,Made with Ingredients found naturally in My. Cranberry & Pear Tree Leaves
- Visibly evens and renews the appearance of your skin and brightens your complexion. Our enhanced formula reverses the appearance of damage to your skin so skin tone is visibly more even.

(<http://www.amazon.com/Nadinola-Hne-Free-Cream-Sensitive/ dp/ B00IN Y 84DU>

[ydroquino](#) accessed 18th May, 2015).

It is made from the leaves of plants which already makes it seem more natural but also the product of scientific innovation which still has the same effect of visibly 'evening' and 'renewing' the appearance of skin and 'brightening' the complexion. These are the effects that all skin bleachers would still expect from Nadinola as a contemporary global brand. It promises to reverse the appearance of damage to skin tone making it visibly more even. Visibility is significant for the bleacher as the skin transformation occurs on the surface of the body on which aesthetic labour has been performed to bring into being the desired latent image (Tate, 1999). That latent image has affect attached to it- either that of despair at being darker skinned or that of pride when the light skin appears. The aesthetic labour of bleaching is also affective labour on and for the self. As they become lighter through this technology of the self they effect affective

changes in Black social and political relations within the Black Nationalist skin fixity/'post-race' neoliberal skin hybridity binary. Nadinola also has brand loyalty or markets itself as having that through its 'Generations' skin bleaching cream which is sold for 'outer beauty' implying that inner beauty also needs to be reflected on the outside as Black women have been doing for generations and continue to do today. Naming the cream *Generations* already does the performative work of producing skin bleaching as a transgenerational practice in which this cream has a central location. The cream's centrality for the consumer also gives it a feeling of being handed down as a Black beauty secret within families and communities. Being handed down from grandmother, to mother, to daughter also erases the risk involved in skin bleaching. However, moving from mercury and hydroquinone to the new miracle product, Glutathione, is still risky for the skin.

### **Science vs risk: 21<sup>st</sup> century Glutathione and transitioning from mercury and hydroquinone**

Mercury inhibits the production of melanin producing lighter skin and is in inorganic and organic forms in cosmetics. Inorganic mercury is used in skin lightening soaps and creams. Organic mercury compounds (thiomersal [ethyl mercury] and phenyl mercuric salts) are used as preservatives in eye makeup cleansing products and mascara. On ebay we are told that *Nadinola De Luxe Bleaching Cream* contains 3% ammoniated mercury. Walmart's online customers are advised to stop using *Nadinola Skin Discoloration Fade Cream* (also available on Amazon and sites which are dedicated to skin bleaching creams) 'if a gradual blue black darkening of the skin occurs'. It lists its active ingredients as HQ 3% (skin lightener) and octisalate 3% (sunscreen). Mercury and hydroquinone have been proven to be harmful to skin and health generally but they are still in use across the Black Atlantic.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Glutathione has emerged as a skin 'whitener'/'lightener' without skin/body risk and its popularity has swept the world from the Pacific to the Atlantic zones. Just what is glutathione? If we look at the many 'infomercials' through which it is marketed online or the 'edumericals' which warn against its use we see that Glutathione is a compound generated by the liver. Its natural presence in the body persuades us against its risk because we are urged to see it as a 'natural compound' which participates in body and cellular functions such as anti-oxidant defence, metabolism and regulation. It is composed of the amino acids glutamine, glycine and cysteine and is not required as a food supplement because it is abundant in fresh fruit and vegetables. 'It may have the effect, although also disputed by many, of skin whitening by inactivating the enzyme tyrosinase which is necessary in melanin production and converts the pigment to the lighter phaeomelanin'. If it is taken orally its 'bio-availability' is reduced because it is 'hydrolysed' by digestive juices and further degraded by the liver ([www.doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Advisories\\_cosmetic\\_DOH-FDA%20Advisory%20No%202011-004.pdf](http://www.doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Advisories_cosmetic_DOH-FDA%20Advisory%20No%202011-004.pdf) accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2015). Such 'edu- / info-mercials' construct this product as a technological advance because of their use of 'scientific' language like 'bio-availability' and 'hydrolysed'. The global availability of Glutathione in pill form is clear if we do a cursory check for this substance online. It is widely sold as an anti-oxidant and a skin lightener even though the fact of its low bio-availability in oral form must be clear to its producers and marketers. Not to be outdone by the body's degradation there is also a healthy market in intravenous Glutathione, again marketed as an anti-oxidant and skin lightener by clinics and entrepreneurs around the world. Intravenous administration does deliver very high doses directly into the circulatory system, by-passing the stomach. However, this 'may overload the renal

circulation' ([www.doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Advisories\\_cosmetic\\_DOH-FDA%20Advisory%20No%202011-004.pdf](http://www.doh.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Advisories_cosmetic_DOH-FDA%20Advisory%20No%202011-004.pdf) accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2015).

The dangers of intravenous Glutathione have led to a warning to the public in the USA by the FDA in 2011 on 'Safety on the off-label use of Glutathione Solution for Injection (IV)'. This advisory states that the use of Glutathione IV as a skin whitener is not approved by the FDA and asks members of the public to refrain from its use for this purpose in light of potential harm resulting from its use

The alarming increase in the unapproved use of glutathione administered intravenously as skin whitening agent at very high doses is unsafe and may result in serious consequences for the health of users. There is inadequate safety information on the use of high doses of glutathione administered at 600 mg to 1.2 grams once weekly and even twice weekly. The only approved indication of the use of the intravenous format of glutathione is as an adjunctive treatment to reduce neurotoxicity associated with cisplatin chemotherapy.

Glutathione which is sold globally has not been stringently tested and proved safe for human consumption as a skin lightener in its intravenous form even though it has GRAS (Generally recognized as safe) status for use in food as L-Glutathione in the USA. The FDA has said, for instance, that the brand *Luxe Whitening Enhanced Glutathione* carries unacceptable claims as a food supplement as it does not remove blemishes, pimples and acne problems; clean internal organs especially the liver; detoxify the body and destroy free radicals that can cause cancer or protect cells and is not needed by the body. Yet these are consistent and constant claims being made for Glutathione by companies online and on ebay and Amazon and by skin lightening clinics with an online presence. These companies seem to be operating on the

premise that lighter beauty comes from within rather than from external application of cream, gel or make-up. Glutathione seems to be absolutely below the radar for NICE in the UK and the one clinical trial on it as an oral whitening agent referenced by NICE in the UK was done in the Philippines in 2014 by the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL) (<https://www.evidence.nhs.uk/Search?q=glutathione+for+skin+whitening> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015).

In this clinical trial the overall dosage of 1,000 mg a day had statistically significant results for skin lightening in a number of subjects. However, longer-term safety remains an issue and more extensive clinical trials were suggested as a result. Irrespective of the need for further clinical tests, women and men continue to use a substance which is only approved in cancer treatments to lighten their skins without any knowledge of its long term consequences. Further, skin lightening entrepreneurs are both creating a market and supplying the product and service to fill the demand. Glutathione's popularity stems from it being marketed as more effective than other products without causing the same skin damage/irritations as other products and procedures, such as, ammoniated mercury, hydroquinone, kojic acid and micro-dermabrasion. It is also billed as a permanent way to lighten the skin as long as the maintenance regime is followed. We will recall from the previous chapter that one of the aspects of that was the use of suppositories which we can assume also bypasses the stomach enabling high doses of Glutathione to enter the blood stream.

Far from being harmless as is claimed by its sellers and advertisers, the FDA Advisory No 2011-004 outlines several serious and potentially fatal side effects of using



Glutathione intravenously for skin whitening which have been reported. The information on one of the side effects of skin rashes, the potentially fatal and extremely painful Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis make for sober reading. Stevens-Johnson syndrome is a rare condition caused by 'over-reaction' of the immune system. The skin and surfaces of the eyes, mouth, throat and vagina blister and peel (<http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/medical-information/search-medical-conditions/stevens-johnson-syndrome> accessed 18th May, 2015). There is a similar blistering of mucous membranes in toxic epidermal necrolysis where the top layer of the skin (the epidermis) peels off from large areas of the body. Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis usually begin with fever, headache, cough, and body aches. A flat red rash breaks out on the face and upper body, spreading to the rest of the body in an irregular pattern often with blisters. The skin of the blisters is very loose and easy to rub off. In Stevens-Johnson syndrome, less than 10% of the body surface is affected, but, in toxic epidermal necrolysis, 30% or more of the skin peels off and the hair and nails can also fall out. The active stage of rash and skin loss can last from 1 to 14 days ([http:// www.merck manuals. com/ home/skin-disorders/hypersensitivity-and-inflammatory-skin-disorders/stevens-johnson-syndrome-sjs-and-toxic-epidermal-necrolysis](http://www.merck-manuals.com/home/skin-disorders/hypersensitivity-and-inflammatory-skin-disorders/stevens-johnson-syndrome-sjs-and-toxic-epidermal-necrolysis) accessed 18th May 2015).

Glutathione is just as harmful for the skin as the peeling resulting from mercury and hydroquinone and bleaching creams made from mixing various creams and gels used in the diaspora. In these two life- threatening conditions there is a separation of the epidermis from the dermis because of cell death. These potentially fatal side effects have led to Glutathione intravenous kits purchased by mail order which include needles and sterile solution being confiscated in the USA and the public being warned about the use of Glutathione injectables in the Philippines (ABS CBN News June 1

2011) because of its serious health risk to users and it has also been named illegal ([www.abcnews.com/lifestyle/06/01/11/glutathione-injectables-not-legal-fda](http://www.abcnews.com/lifestyle/06/01/11/glutathione-injectables-not-legal-fda) accessed 17th May 2015). Even given this international movement against the skin lightener the UK has remained silent as has the EU. .

Glutathione use can also affect the thyroid system, a side-effect that is not mentioned in product labelling. This can have profound health impact as the thyroid gland regulates the metabolic rate and produces hormones which affect heart and digestive function, muscle control, brain development and bone maintenance. Its functioning is dependent on a good supply of iodine from the diet not from taking Glutathione as a supplement. Glutathione use has also been suspected in kidney dysfunction which can result in kidney failure or death. Severe abdominal pain has also been reported in patients receiving twice weekly intravenous administrations. Incorrect intravenous administration techniques can lead to micro-organisms entering the body resulting in serious infections including fatal sepsis. Injecting air can also lead to potentially fatal embolus, while unsafe use of needles can result in HIV and Hepatitis B transmission. Serious infections can also result from counterfeit Glutathione which has an increasing online market presence.

Refining skin shade transformation through the appliance of derma science is not going so very well with Glutathione in the USA even though as we see with Mzhosa in South Africa, this is part of her weekly beauty regime done in a clinic under medical supervision so that she does not regain her natural pigmentation. Even in the face of all of these potentially fatal side-effects we still see it being callously marketed online and in clinics around the world including the UK without regard for consumer risk. It seems to be the 21<sup>st</sup> century's ultimate skin lightening solution, especially for those

who can afford to have it under medical supervision. It is also a product which is marketed across ethnicities for permanent skin 'whitening'/ lightening. This product has not yet been banned in the UK and is not a skin lightening substance whose sales have to be intervened in by Trading Standards Services. It does not either appear with the list of skin lightening problem products that we see on NHS pages. It is just part of the multi-billion dollar skin lightening business globally which, untested for hazards to humans, will most likely cause death or suffering to some consumers at a later stage. Therefore, if we can now lighten the skin in a way which is irreversible as long as we keep up the treatment regime what does that mean for Blackness in the diaspora and the African continent and for the 'essential Black subject'?

### **Colourism's reign: The death of 'the essential Black subject' and the skin meanings of 21<sup>st</sup> century 'browning'**

In the first week of August 2015 the story about a Russian laboratory which had invented a method of removing the upper layers of Black people's skin to quickly 'whiten' them and the claim that 254 people in Russia had already had this treatment went viral on the internet (<http://trendingstylist.com/remove-the-black-skin/> accessed 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2015). Remembering what was said above about the side effects of Glutathione one wonders if this is not Stevens-Johnson Syndrome or toxic epidermal necrolysis induced by the treatment. One of the pictures which accompanied graphic images of a man passively submitting to his skin being peeled from his body was that of a white man clad in sports gear biting his knuckles as if to say 'OMG! That has to hurt!' Whether hoax or true the text which also accompanies some of the reports is that the Russian Government will consider paying for this treatment to enable darker skinned immigrants to fit in with their white Russian neighbours. If one peels off the skin though does one become 'white'? Hardly, that is not how 'race' works but what

this shows again is that darker Black skin is problematized even outside of the Black Atlantic. The internet with its before and after pictures, testimonials from consumers and certifications from medical professionals, naturopaths and companies keep the market in skin lightening/'whitening' turning over massive profits. Clearly 'the play of images and signifiers especially using computer technology, has become an important accompaniment of postmodern theoretical influences' (Doy, 1999:23). I would like to go beyond this and situate this play of images in our 'post-race' neo-liberal racialization contemporary. Here we need to think about the making of global markets through computer technology where virtual reality takes the place of reality as we enter the zone of Jean Baudrillard's (1981) 'simulacra'. As simulacra, changing Black skins decentre the authentic Black subject established by Black Nationalist and white supremacist discourses. This signals the end of fixed identities, Fanon's (1986) historico-racial schema and racial epidermal schema and 'the essential Black subject' located within the colonial psyche and Black Nationalist discourses.

The late cultural critic, Stuart Hall (1996), spoke about this demise of essence and the emergence of multiplicity when he looked at the politics of representation. For him, how things are represented and the representational 'machineries' and regimes play a constitutive role and not merely an after the fact role in constructing Blackness and the Black subject. Postmodernism as part of Eurocentric cultural theory has come face to face with Black cultural politics which Gen Doy (1999) points us to earlier so that we are now in a space and time of 'the death of the essential Black subject' and the emergence of a Black 'post-race aesthetics' where

What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose

the category 'black', that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories which therefore has no guarantee in nature (Hall, 1996: 443).

This means a fading of 'Black' serving as a guarantee for cultural practice or aesthetic value because

Once you enter the politics of the end of the essential black subject you are plunged headlong into the maelstrom of a continuously contingent unguaranteed political argument and debate [...] You can no longer conduct black politics through a simple set of reversals putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject (Hall, 1996: 444).

There cannot be reversals but there can be re-versionings of Black skin and its political allegiances through bleaching/lightening/toning as we saw in Jamaica. The politics of skin colour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Black Atlantic means that the essentially 'good Black subject' is no longer juxtaposed with whiteness as binary other but rather with Blackness itself. Black Nationalist politics across the diaspora has meant both that darker skin colour is valorized but also that tampering with that in any way to become 'brown' means much more than just individualized, apolitical 'enhancement'. As we have seen for Black Nationalists bleaching means that Black people have fallen prey to continuing white supremacy. In line with the critique of this position maintained throughout, what if we instead see this as Black people falling prey to continuing Black colourism and also producing skins with aesthetic, cultural, social and economic value in the context in which they find themselves? What if we instead think about why there is a continuing need to brand oneself as 'brown' rather than darker skinned within the

diaspora on the part of some individuals? What if instead we wonder why we have to say 'some individuals' here because not everyone engages in skin bleaching irrespective of skin colour which would be the case if white supremacy was as hegemonic as claimed?.

What we see if we re-focus our political and aesthetic reasoning on Blackness itself is that there are multiple Black skins. There are also multiple Black subjects produced through skin transformations which make colour boundaries indeterminate and hybrid (Tate, 2005; Bhabha, 1994) as they produce the 'in-between' of the bleached Black body. This in-between is no longer mediated by those two master signifiers Black and white but rather remains within the Black signifier as the darker skinned/ lighter skinned binary within which 'bleached brownings' are an-other term.

If the lighter skinned ideal is constructed for us within a neo-liberal racial aestheticization ideology of freedom to choose what our skins look like, we need never feel guilt or shame as we try to emulate that ideal through bleaching. We can exculpate ourselves through selective association with skin brightening/lightening/toning and, thus, establish selective distancing from bleaching.

This need not be parsed as a turning away from Blackness but rather can become a widening of its skin possibilities as is the case for other racial groups. Skin bleachers openly embrace 'the unnatural' in order to re-orient skins away from the rigid authenticity rules of Blackness and towards challenging the aesthetic rules of the Racial Contract in which whiteness is the only ideal. Bleachers also show themselves as active in skin colour enhancement so they go beyond the necessity to be 'fake' and the 'rule' against skin colour transformation that 'beauty comes from within'.

## **Conclusion**

As we saw previously in Jamaica there are 'original brownings' and 'bleached' ones. 'Original' points to skin colour privilege whereas to be 'bleached' imparts inauthenticity and being a 'poor copy' of something more valuable. This value is measured aesthetically, politically, economically or culturally within a habitus of brown shades as ideal. Brownness, whether interpreted as Nadionla's 'golden' or 'browning' multi shaded skins means that there can never be an original or copies of that original. This reminds us of Walter Benjamin's (1999) idea of translation in which there is never the possibility of an exact copy but rather an endless possibility of difference. Highlighting the difference within brownness does not deny the fact of Blackness but refuses homology by negating the binary fake/original. This should be taken on board especially if we recall that the only 'fake' white people are Black people trying to pass as 'white' or, as is the case with Rachel Dolzeal white people trying to pass as Black. We should also recall that this passing always relates to the political and racialized gender libidinal economies of racism and colourism in which individuals find themselves. Without change in these economies and their related ideologies and affective loads, 'the fake browning' will comprise the third term within the darker/lighter skin dichotomy so that the new tri-partite skin system will read darker/bleached/lighter. This change will continue to speak the political vulnerability of Black skin especially if we look at the ethical imperative not to bleach which still persists within Black skin politics. The conclusion now turns to this focus as it thinks further about decolonizing skin.