



empire and I

thinking about 'race' and nation

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The conceptual frameworks that dominate our understanding of ideas of 'race' and nation are frameworks inherited from empire. 'The term race has dubious descriptive value' writes Eriksen, and yet it functions as a constitutive cultural and conceptual construct, in part bequeathed by empire. These totalizing narratives profoundly influence our modern subjectivities and contribute to an idea of who and what we are, yet are fundamentally incapable of recognising individual narrative and personal history, and the simultaneous operation of layers of difference.

When we (the 'we' is a collective 'we' - as individuals we may not always) talk about 'race' and nation, these ways of thinking are the frameworks we use. When we make the decision to subscribe to certain classifications, to categorize - 'black', 'white', 'Asian', 'mixed-race', 'Chinese', 'Jewish'. When we talk about 'British-ness' and 'foreign-ness', when we discuss employment, housing, policing, schooling, culture, immigration, health, hygiene, sexuality, criminality, deviancy and disease, we find ourselves in a particular metaphorical terrain. Judgements have been made, the theory, the arguments, the ways of making sense of things are already in place. We take up a position, within a prescribed set of positions, in a limited field of options. Between ways of seeing ourselves, ways of seeing others and ways of being seen, we experience a deep divergence, as pre-determined frameworks of thought contribute to a crisis of perception and representation.

There is a challenge to these conceptual frameworks in recognising their histories, and their ongoing social function, in teasing out their epistemologies and exposing their foundation. I will be considering, in relation to these legacies, what an exhibition like *empire and I* can hope to achieve.

Empire and I has been conceived as a space in which to exploit an iconic moment of constructed history like the 'millennium'. We can choose to translate this framework into an opportunity, a chance to make an unflinching assessment of our 'past'. The inverted commas highlight my understanding that there is no closure on the 'past', but a variety of ways in which history meets the present, where moments in history and the history of thought continue to impact on and interact with our own ways of being and thinking. Within that context, Catherine Hall has described the 'memory work' that is necessary on empire, the importance of examining painful connections with colonial histories, of a society 'coming to terms with its own raced history', as that history has an ongoing influence in the present.

Within the 'raced history' of Britain, it is worth investigating the origins of a concept of 'race', as ideas of 'race' continue to focus on an essentialist, pseudo-scientific set of distinctly physical meanings. Historical patterns of racism continue to focus on the same constants, used to justify a catalogue of social inequity and racist perceptions. This is despite an understanding in contemporary science that 'race' is without biological meaning. Peter Fryer finds that there is 'no scientific basis for dividing people into biological groups according to phenotypical factors and attributing fixed cultural attributes to these groups'. There is no basis for 'racial' division. Even at the beginning of 'racial science' there was more 'variation' within so-called 'races' than between them.

Fryer is able to describe the many ways in which 'racial science' 'observed'/imagined, catalogued 'evidence' of 'racial difference', attributed inherited characteristics to 'groups' and constructed a racialised hierarchy, a means of 'validating' slavery and later colonialism. Fryer describes notions of 'white' British superiority maintained with the authority of phrenology, teleology, evolutionism, social darwinism, Anglo-Saxonism, trusteeship. Each specialization described the 'naturalness and necessity' of 'white' British domination, with subtly different emphases, and a ruthless faith in the 'objectivity' of the scientific gaze.

When economic and ideological necessity demanded racist discourse, racist discourse was produced. In the 12th century the British needed to 'see' the Irish classified as 'savages'. Later, only a comprehensive ideology detailing the depravity, savagery and inferiority of the 'lower' races could 'justify' the systemic enslavement of Africans from the 18th century on. 'Racism' constructs 'racial difference'. Slaves were seen as 'children', 'savages', slavery was described as a blessing to all, a humanizing influence, as later, colonialism was seen to be. 'It is because there are people like this in the world', wrote Daily Mail correspondent G.W. Stevens in 1898, 'that there is an Imperial Britain. This sort of creature has to be ruled, so we rule him, for his own good and our own'. As long as 'different' 'races' could be described in such ways, Britain could present her colonial subjects as utterly incapable of self-government and this, not the greed and arrogance of the colonial power, was presented as the motivation for empire. Rather than an isolated belief system, ideologies of 'racial' hierarchy permeated every class and every thought on empire. Philosophers, even those who talked of individual rights, argued not over 'racial science', but whether colonial subjects constituted the same species as the 'noble' European.

Imagined as a void, a receptacle of fantasies, the colonial space was over-mapped with European names and measurements, 'the history of the land deleted'.² There was, writes Juliana Enberg, 'an inevitability about European blindness'.³ As Lawrence James notes, 'there was general agreement [in Britain] that the empire was a powerful force for the spread of civilisation and the imposition of superior codes of behaviour on its 'savage' inhabitants'.

Through the distorting lens of an ideology of intellectual and scientific imperialism, a number of fears, desires and fantasies are focussed on a racialised 'other'. As moral as well as physical inferior, the 'native' represented a threat to the colonialist on a number of levels. Literature of the time sees the 'native' as representing a 'dark side' of the human psyche, a more bestial, primitive being; the colonial power his knowledgeable, stable and civilised counterpart. Ultimately, the colonialist's fantasy is narcissistic: he fashions a sense of his own moral strength, courage, nobility and rationality against an imagined obverse of polar opposites - the colonial subject - who is nothing but a site on which to project the desires and dreams of the colonialist, his sense of what he is and is not.

Within this artificial hierarchy, our sense of ourselves as 'raced' evolves, along with a sense of the power relations that govern the process of becoming 'raced'. Ruth Frankenberg writes that 'in a landscape structured by racism, a conceptual mapping of race, of self and others take shape'.⁴ Frantz Fanon articulates from the position of 'black' subject, a complex and insidious internalization of negative images of 'blackness'. Sander Gilman describes a process by which the 'raced' is forced to shoulder responsibility for his or her oppression. 'For centuries', writes Catherine Hall, 'white identities in Britain have been rooted in a sense of superiority derived from the power exercised over racialised others'. In other, more liberal spheres, there is 'an investment in myths of 'sameness'⁵ and unconscious acceptance of the ongoing privileges that 'race' confers on those perceived as 'white'. Only recently have 'white' theorists begun to recognise these privileges and understand their ideological and social construction and dedicated history.

In *White*, Richard Dyer describes how, conceptually, 'white' people allow themselves to take up a position of ordinariness and centrality; they are uncontextualised. It is an aspect of what bell hooks terms 'white supremacy', that 'whiteness' is allowed to go 'unraced'. 'Other people', writes Dyer, 'are raced, we are just people'. The power that lies behind structural white

supremacy is in its invisibility. What appears most 'realistic' or 'natural' is that which is in fact most stylised.

'White' liberalism has some investment in the notion that racism is an ideology, which can be chosen or rejected, that has no basis in ongoing social relations and structures, is not part of a historical, conceptual inheritance. This accounts for a failure to recognise and challenge the privileges of 'whiteness' which are predicated on unconscious, systemic racism. We conceptualise 'whiteness' as 'racially neutral', are aware of oppression structuring the lives of 'raced' others, but not the privilege that shapes our own, the 'unearned advantage and conferred dominance',⁶ the racist structures that define our lives. This unacknowledged assurance of 'white' neutrality colours our thought to such an extent that it is possible for 'white' critical thinkers to conceive of the end of subjectivity, speaking for all humanity, without ever contemplating the specificity and particularity of their 'unraced' position.

'Whiteness' is typically represented as unworthy of observation. In contrast, the 'raced' body or identity endures an obsessive over-signification, an unnaturally heavy burden of responsibility for the history of 'race'. Some of the work in *empire and I* explores the responsibilities that the 'raced' artist is asked to shoulder, as he or she struggles to represent an individual perspective through an obsessive focus on his or her 'race'. For the 'raced' artist, 'race' is seen as the determining factor, the essence of all endeavour, in ways which are never applied to the 'non-raced'.

In a post-colonial environment,⁷ explorations of cultural and 'racial' identity have opened up, which recognise the operation and experience of 'race' as a political definition. David A. Bailey, illustrating the importance of Frantz Fanon, describes 'the possibility of an alternative discourse'⁸ that originates in the self-definition and representation of 'black' cultural politics. Stuart Hall describes in 'New Ethnicities', the grouping of diverse communities under a 'necessary fiction', a unifying framework of 'black-ness', in a politics of resistance that offers a critical, oppositional aesthetic to challenge 'white' cultural discourse. Hall also signals the limits of this approach, founded on a fictive essentialism, which relies on a suppression of 'internal' difference and compound and performative identities.

There is a sense in which political definitions of 'race' that emphasize internal homogeneity and fixity contribute to the maintenance of pre-structured binaries: an 'other' with a voice continues to be an 'other'.

Racisms and nationalisms are contingent, having evolved both within and outside of colonialism, they intersect in a variety of ways at different discursive moments. The nature of *empire and I* and other work that has emerged towards the end of this century, is of a cultural response founded on diverse positions that defy 'racial' and discursive fixity. *empire and I* has been conceived as a space in which to explore deeply personal responses to constitutive identities, multiple subjectivities, to explore the ways in which individual narratives are disruptive of colonial hierarchies and binaries. The exhibition originated in the visual art practice of its curator, London-based, Jewish Australian artist Alana Jelinek. Ideas around 'difference', privilege and cultural displacement have been central to her artwork, in part as a result of her own relationship with British colonialism and constructions of 'race'.

The experience Jelinek articulates is one of being born of a mixed Jewish/gentile marriage, raised in a liberal Jewish community of mainly Holocaust refugees, 'mixed-raced' from inside that community and 'raced' from without, viewed through racist perceptions of Jewishness and marginalised in a Christian Commonwealth country with a deference for British culture. At the same time it's an experience of being accorded the privileges of the 'white' European colonial settler: land, education, health, and the countless less apparent privileges of 'whiteness' that 'non-white' and particularly Aboriginal Australians are denied.

The vision she brings to *empire and I* is of a radically individual approach to the negotiation of compound identities, in all their depth and apparent contradiction, an approach that characterises contributions to the exhibition. Work was commissioned from artists whose concerns for individual representation were apparent in their work thus far. Self-definition, a questioning of perceptions, cultural duality, performativity, 'mixed-race', experiences of dislocation and diaspora, migration, intersections of gender, class and sexuality, religion, background and personal history: the suggestion is that there is a cultural and individual specificity and particularity in the construction of even the most seemingly uniform and 'fixed' identity. It is an experience of blurred distinctions that proves willfully resistant to classification and belies the simplistic, ideological definitions of 'race' and nation. The boundaries of 'racial' and national distinction are seen to be contingent, ultimately insupportable.

There is no doubt that existing representations are reductive, that they preclude a sense of self that is coherent, autonomous and individual. *empire and I* is

fundamentally concerned with representation that is not reductive in its understanding of multiple, apparently contradictory identities and the developments they are making in relation to each other.

Rea's work is concerned with enunciating experiences of urban aboriginality in contemporary Australia, through historical and cultural 'memory'. In *EYE/TMM A BLAKPIECE*, Rea traces a history inscribed on the black female body as a (in this case absent/imagined) site of various ideological constructs. In the last frame, the artist steps in to disrupt the controlling colonial narrative and claim an agency, which is outside of colonial codes of representation. She is the photographer in this image, the 'owner of the gaze'. Her own face is obscured, denying access to the voyeuristic colonial gaze.

In my reading, Erika Tan's work for *empire and I* refers directly to the taxonomy and typology of imperial 'racial science'. Her intervention into Victorian sensibilities is one that brings, through sound and projections, contingency and doubt to a place that typically characterises itself as stable, knowledgeable and normative. Tan utilises the 'fabric' of the colonial mind to impinge on a territory that is guardedly private, enacting a reverse colonisation that makes visible, in the words of Hazel Carby, 'what is rendered invisible, when viewed as the normative state of existence'.

Shaheen Merali's work references the diminution and sense of horror that characterize representations of the 'other' in colonial discourse. His glass cases recreate the colonial space, as a museum, an authorised and acceptable space, which traditionally enabled the colonial gaze access to the fetishized 'other'. Franchesca Cubillo Alberts has described the sense of urgency that accompanied European ethnographic 'documentation' of 'native' cultures, regarded as authentic living specimens of primitive man, and the way in which the 'colonial gaze was ... legitimised under the guise of academic scholarship'.¹⁰

Each of these artists engage on some level in disrupting the voyeuristic exoticism and diminution of colonial inscriptions of 'otherness' and, in the context of this exhibition, inferring the negative impact of colonial representations on contemporary subjectivities.

The work of Lorrice Douglas can be read as an exploration of the burden of representation. Douglas focuses on the violence of responses to previous work, demonstrating perhaps that the presence of the 'other' in anything but certain prescribed postures continues to

excite horror and anger. Expectations and projections of the 'raced' artist are seen to be hugely over-signified. Audiences respond with violent outrage to an artist that refuses their expectations in terms of muted subjectivity. This seems to bear out Richard Dyer's assertion that 'the right not to conform ... is the right of the most privileged groups in society',¹¹ in this case, those arbitrarily perceived as 'unraced'.

Tertia Longmire's work can also be read as an attempt to locate her own particularity and cultural specificity under the burden of an un-asked for history. In two separate pieces, the artist imagines both the quiet ghosts of a faceless history and all the energy and potential of a radically altered future. She rejects the imperial representations of 'whiteness' and 'Britishness', in eternal opposition to 'otherness' and suggests an element of performative agency in her image of future possibilities.

In the stylised space of the figurative painting, Alana Jelinek places a group of 'white' tourists, in the Australian desert, the 'terra nullius' that Australia was conceived as before it was yet 'discovered'. What are they doing there and what are they looking at? The work raises the kind of questions that tourists/colonisers rarely do. The voyeuristic tourist, like the colonial power, arrives with a highly developed sense of superiority and entitlement. He passes through, unscathed, leaving a narrative of nationality and a trail of destruction in his wake. In the safety of his homeland, he proceeds to represent 'otherness' as something knowable and contained. His snapsnaps of 'natives', his scalplings, are a fixed and constant conquest of the 'raced' colonial subject, bloodless trophies that re-inscribe colonial codes.

Anthony Key's map of Britain envisages an ironic and subtle invasion that references the fear of 'otherness', constructed in such detail in the colonial mind. The work re-maps Britain as Britain re-mapped her colonial territory, and immediately, the colonial power is a territory under negotiation, the site of a battle for nationhood and definition. Key's Great Wall also stands as monument to the 'homeland' transposed onto 'foreign' soil: not Jerusalem, but a Great Wall, builded here, in England's green and pleasant land. In a reversal of the colonial order, Britain is imagined as 'unstable ground' on which a continuous negotiation of definition is taking place.

The photographic installation of Niema Khan, which also combines ideas of homeland and ties of communal and connection, suggests the intimacy and expe-

rience of family memory. As in Rea's work, the piece suggests corporeality without depicting it and the absent body is that of an ancestor (grandparent). The piece explores ways in which the colonised individual invests in the colonial power, the contemporary individual invests in narratives of history and individual identities interact with colonial history and myth. Photography, traditional medium of 'objective' ethnography, is re-claimed as a means of un-doing and re-thinking the authorised version of colonial history.

Colin Darke's piece suggests a prescribed and contained set of ideologies through which to experience the legacy of imperialism and other histories. The gallery walls are indelibly inscribed with an overwhelming body of text, the work of Karl Marx. The legacy of colonialism can be read as a legacy of individual powerlessness in the face of the forces of history and the laws of capitalist economics. Peter Fryer describes how capitalism, loudly proclaiming its principle of freedom of the individual, depended in its earliest history on the labour of slaves, and justified this with the most virulent racism. The work, like all the work in *empire and I*, seems to be concerned with the assertion of individuality against the perceived force of historic inevitability.

It is my belief that cultural discourse, like social discourse, is not merely a space to express certain lived realities, but also a constitutive space, in which ways of thinking can be deconstructed and re-presented, in which opinions and visions are formed. This is not to put unusual burdens on the artist, but to emphasize the connected responsibilities of both parties in a dialogue, artist and audience. *empire and I* is not a sideshow in which audiences come to enjoy the spectacle of political work completed before their arrival and presented for their consumption. We come here to imagine different ways of seeing, our attention is drawn to what is unseen. What has appeared immutable begins to look less stable.

Art has a potential for intimate communication of individual ideas and experiences that is rare in a society mediated through monopolised channels of communication, which have never been either democratic or unraced. 'Art' as Jean Fisher has noted, 'remains one of the few areas where you can have the experience of something other than a mediated experience'.¹² The work of *empire and I* is an attempt to circumvent the pre-structured frameworks of thought that mediate our experiences, to suggest fresh ways of viewing a legacy of thought and its effects on contemporary subjectivities.

What frames our vision and mediates our experience? In different ways, we subscribe to patterns of fear and ignorance that have characterised racist thought for centuries, born into a limited field of options, a legacy of thought and dearly cherished prejudice. We have an opportunity to question the prejudices that have been our inheritance and think outside of the accustomed frameworks. We don't believe we are affected, but imagining, and continuing to imagine, new futures means sorting through the tired ideas of 'race', ideas of what constitutes Britain, ideas that were founded on visions of empire and structures of racialised hierarchy.

Ruth Frankenberg writes that 'any system of differentiation shapes those upon whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses'.¹³ How do we, as individuals, choose to respond to the colonial legacy, a system of racialised differentiation? The question is not an idle one. We sustain that system when we choose not to acknowledge it, choose to ignore the way it shapes us. And yet, acknowledging it means stepping into an uncertain terrain, in which we will be obliged to think independently, outside the limits of pre-determined discourse. We would have to un-think the things we were taught, the things we thought we knew. And that would take courage.

juliette brown,
january 1999

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1 Avtar Brah, 1993, p.11

2 Zara Stanhope, *Colonial Post Colonial*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1996, p.36

3 Juliana Engberg, *Colonial Post Colonial* exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1996, p.12

4 Ruth Frankenberg, 'Growing Up White: Feminism, Racism and the Social Geography of Childhood', *Feminist Review*, No 45, Autumn 1993, p. 77

5 bell hooks, 1992, p. 167

6 Peggy McIntosh, 1988, p.14

7 In this context, 'post-colonial' refers to a world order no longer based on European empires, rather than a conceptual post-colonialism. As bell hooks points out, conceptual colonialism will end with the acknowledgement of white supremacy and steps towards its displacement as a governing ideology.

8 David A. Bailey in an introductory essay to the *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire*, exhibition, ICA, London, May 1995

9 Hazel Carby, 1992, p.193

10 Francesca Cubillo Alberts, *EYETMMABLAKEPIECE*, exhibition catalogue, 1997, p.4

11 Richard Dyer, *White*, 1997, p.12

12 Jean Fisher, speaking at Radical Postures, art, new media and race, symposium organised by Panchayati Arts Education Resource Unit, in conjunction with the Male Identity Group, University of Westminster as part of the Creative Futures Week, March 1996, quoted in Jeremy Mulvey's foreword

13 Ruth Frankenberg, 1993, p.51

I would like to acknowledge a debt to Alana Jelenc, who has supported the production of this piece in many ways.

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empire and Us

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PERUVIANI



empire and I presents the work of artists who are preoccupied with the colonial legacy and its meanings in the contemporary postcolonial world. It raises questions for all of us. 1998's 50th anniversary celebrations of the arrival of the 'Empire Windrush', symbolising the post-war settlement of Afro-Caribbeans in Britain, has provided an occasion to chart the impact of that presence. West Indian men and women came as busdrivers, building labourers, hospital workers and nurses to settle in Britain. They came home to the 'mother country' only to find that it was not a home for migrants. In the process of their settlement they challenged the established binaries of home/away, metropole/colony, them/us, black/white and contributed to the destabilisation of one version of Britain and the making of another. 'Those people' over there turned out to be [here](#), however much this was resented by some. In the process of making Brixton or Handsworth home, many Jamaicans, Barbadians and Trinidadians discovered that their islands could never be home in quite the same way again.

This is one of the examples of the postcolonial encounter - the encounter between the erstwhile colonisers, the British, and the once colonised West Indians, Afro-Caribbeans as they became. The encounter has changed both groups. The white British have had to recognise that black people do belong, are British: Afro-Caribbeans have claimed a new cultural identity as black Britons. The postcolonial moment, I suggest, postcolonial in the sense that Britain is no longer a major colonial power and that the colonies and dependencies of the nineteenth century have become twentieth century nations, opens up possibilities of new ways of thinking about the legacy of empire. In the time after the empire how does that legacy look?

The legacy is everywhere. The British population itself is shaped by imperial history: the Afro-Caribbean and South Asian presence; the Irish, evidence of the migrations of the mid-nineteenth century and the postwar period, and of the constant movement across the Irish channel over centuries. The cemeteries which provide constant reminders of the diasporic lives of nineteenth

century English, Scottish and Irish men particularly, soldiers who served in India or Africa, sailors who spent their lives crossing oceans, missionaries who returned and died back home. The buildings which offer material reminders of imperial connections, the Bank of England and the Royal Exchange symbolising the financial centre of the globe, the reliefs of Africans' heads with elephants on the facade of the Liverpool Exchange marking the significance of the slave trade to that city's wealth, the great museums of London, packed with imperial treasures, the Hyderabad Barracks in Colchester, reminding us of the links between Britain and India, the West India Dock Company's elegant building just by Canary Wharf, once the meeting place of slave traders and sugar merchants, now the site of refurbished flats for city folks. The streets in every town which mark historic battles and moments, from Trafalgar to Mafeking, signalling the ways in which national identity in Britain has been so profoundly shaped by imperial expansion and danger. The novels which form the national literature, from Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, an English country home financed from the sugar plantations of Antigua to Charles Dickens' unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, touched with the racial fear engendered by the 'Indian Mutiny' of 1857 when 'natives' serving in the British army rebelled against their colonial masters. The quintessential national beverage, tea, imported from Ceylon and India, the demand for it changing the shape of whole regions as tea gardens were laid out, the sugar served with it which transformed the Caribbean into a gigantic sugar plantation, and changed the economy and society of Africa and the Caribbean for ever.

Those legacies are lived in the everyday, for the empire mapped our contemporary world in particular ways, establishing routes and connections which have shown extraordinary resilience. Chance encounters can remind us of these routes. A neighbour on a plane from the Caribbean told me his story. Born in Kenya, a white Briton whose parents had migrated there in the late 1940s, the family moved on to South Africa and settled in Natal. Natal was the major area of sugar production in South Africa and following the example of the West

Indies, Indian indentured labour was introduced. The plantocracy had learned in the post-emancipation West Indies that they could solve what they deemed to be their labour shortage with Indian labour. Lessons such as these were exchanged across the empire, and framed patterns of migration. My neighbour left Natal in 1990 having trained as a sugar engineer and since then has been employed by Manbre, the late twentieth century form of the sugar company Tate and Lyle. Henry Tate's story was a classic tale of entrepreneurial acumen. The son of a Unitarian minister, he was apprenticed to a grocer and soon had six shops in the Liverpool district. Around 1859 he switched to sugar refining and in 1872 built a factory in Liverpool, that city built on slavery. In 1878 he decided to move his business to the metropolis and set up a factory in Silvertown, in Docklands, at the heart of the imperial trading complex. His invention of cube sugar secured his fortune and the Tate Gallery, opened in 1897, reminds us of the ways in which Britain's national treasures are rooted in the fruits of empire. Meanwhile, Abram Lyle, a Scottish sugar refiner, had established his factory almost next door, and his invention of golden syrup ensured the success of his business. In 1921 Tate and Lyle amalgamated and their Thames Refinery is still the world's largest sugar refining complex. In the 1930s they moved into sugar production as well as processing and bought plantations in the West Indies and other sites of empire. They now produce sugar in the United Kingdom, parts of Africa, the West Indies, Canada, Fiji, Sri Lanka and India. These were the routes of empire, still vital in the post-colonial world. My neighbour on the plane had worked in Fiji and Sri Lanka and now works in Guyana. He was en route to India to buy machinery for the sugar industry, that industry which had relied in post-emancipation days on Indian indentured labour, (a pattern which established the ethnic rivalries which have since flourished there). This late twentieth century sugar engineer is the modern counterpart of the nineteenth century entrepreneur or colonial official.

Nadine Gordimer has dubbed the development worker the new missionaries of the postcolonial world. These are global times but both the local and the global bear the signs of empire. Modern economies have been shaped by imperial preferences and needs, contempo-

rary populations have been shaped by the historic movements of labour, both free and unfree, late twentieth century cultures have been marked by both colonizers and colonized and are now being re-worked in the post-colonial moment, still in relations of power but power differently distributed.

Taking a minicab from the airport, with this story vividly in my mind, I found that the driver was also born in Kenya, but this time of Asian parentage. His forbears were indentured labour on the tea plantations of Kenya, involved in the labour movements of the colonized across the British empire, inheriting a passport which continues to make mobility in search of employment a less dangerous strategy than for many others. These narratives provide us with indicators of the differentiated possibilities in the late twentieth century for the descendants of those who were locked into the relations of colonialism.

The empire, I am suggesting, mapped the world in particular ways. Those mappings are re-opened to us in the postcolonial moment with a new clarity. With nations under threat and national histories recognised as the fragile constructions which they are, with globalization re-casting the world across new neo-colonial routes, questions of cultural identity have become pre-eminent. Who are 'we'? What sort of people are 'we'? Where do 'we' belong? What kinds of citizenship are open to 'us'? And who are 'they'? Questions of cultural identity are necessarily historical questions and we are ever more aware of the importance of historical memory. From the debates over General Pinochet and his historic responsibilities for the torture and deaths of Chileans and others to the Truth Commission in South Africa with its awe inspiring task of seeking reconciliation through the speaking of truths about the past, different societies are preoccupied with the legacies of the past and their meanings in the present. Toni Morrison has argued for the importance of 'memory work', the work of remembering what has been forgotten but never erased. Slavery, she reminds us, has left its traces everywhere in the US. Only when that history is properly recovered, placed back in the heart of the culture, will it be possible to move on.

Britain is a society which has prided itself on its history, and has seen that history as constitutive of nationhood. But which historical narratives are told and what stories of empire are pre-eminent in the popular imagination? We need now to re-discover histories of empire and understand the part they have played in the construction of a raced and gendered nation in the present. The old stories of empire - of progress, of a 'civilising mission', of British justice carried across the seas, of the making of a 'greater Britain' through the planting of Anglo-Saxon stock across the globe, of the golden days of the Raj - need to be reconstructed for new times. We need to recover the complex histories of encounters, of migrations, of transculturations, of linked histories across the generations and the centuries. We need to chart the constant attempts to fix racial and gender hierarchies with their real effects of profound inequalities. We need to rediscover the criss-crossings, the mixings and hybridities, the constant movings across the empire of slaves, of indentured labourers, of domestic servants and seamen, of prostitutes and missionaries, of convicts and colonial officials - of their patterns of settlement, of the creation of diasporas, of the construction of imagined homes, communities and nations whose boundaries were fixed momentarily but were always unstable, always subject to change and dissolution.

This new work of historical imagination, of reflecting on the traces of the past as they shape our presents, is the work of many. Bob Marley was crucial to the cultural work of rediscovering Africa in the Caribbean, Toni Morrison has helped African-Americans rediscover themselves. While Constable articulated one vision of what England was in the early nineteenth century, visual artists now are reminding us of the ways in which British selves depended on their colonised others. They are disrupting the binaries of black/white, us/them, destabilising the fixings which were intended to settle relations between coloniser and colonised. *empire and I* is part of that project. I welcome it.

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january 1999



