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A Postcolonial People
South Asians in Britain

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NARRATING THE POSTCOLONIAL
POLITICAL AND
THE IMMIGRANT IMAGINARY

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‘Imperialism did not end, did not suddenly become “past”, once decolonisation had set in motion the dismantling of the classical empires. A legacy of connections still binds countries like Algeria and India to France and Britain respectively. A vast new population of Muslims, Africans and West Indians from former colonial territories now resides in metropolitan Europe; even Italy, Germany and Scandinavia today must deal with these dislocations, which are to a large degree the result of imperialism and decolonisation as well as expanding European population.’ (Said, 1993: 282)

‘If the law is the apparatus that binds and seals the universality of the political body of the nation, then the “immigrant”, produced by the law as margin and threat to that symbolic whole, is precisely a generative site for the critique of that universality.’ (Lowe, 1996: 9-10)

Britain in the 1960s: A man arrives at Heathrow airport, stands in line before passport control. He has no family with him, he does not speak the language and he has no more than five pounds in his pocket. His clothes, bearing and face mark him out as a foreigner, from India or Pakistan, who has come to work in Britain. Possibly he will find a job in the textile mills up North, a tyre factory in the Midlands, or maybe at London Transport. As he stands in the queue his thoughts wander back to family and friends, perhaps he is thinking of the day when he will have earned enough to return. Maybe he is preoccupied with the strange sights that greet him, surrounded by images and sounds that confound him. It would not be surprising if he is overcome by a mixture of excitement and anxiety, realising he stands in a country he has previously known only through travellers’ tales and myths. Could it be that what he feels is not that different from the emotions that must have been felt by another group of voyagers from another, much earlier time and different place?

OVER 500 YEARS EARLIER

In May 1498 the Portuguese Vasco da Gama arrived off the coast of what is now called Kerala bearing letters for Prester John, who was thought
to be the monarch of a realm described as the 'extreme Orient beyond Persia and Armenia'. Da Gama's encounter with unfamiliar Indians was mediated by a knowledge of the familiar, the vocabulary of which he had to resort to in order to describe what he saw. However, he was not able to transform South Asia so that it conformed to his descriptive scheme; da Gama’s arrival was still pre-colonial. In contrast, the subsequent colonial project sought to recast South Asia in terms of the Western imagination—constructing ‘South Asia’ as we know it—and was part of a re-ordering of the world in European terms. Or as one writer puts it, in reference to the conception of Asia as a continent: ‘The term, it is recognised, is essentially Western. There is no equivalent word in any Asian language nor such a concept in the domain of geographical knowledge’ (Chaudhuri, 1991: 23). In this way we can understand the emergence of a South Asia, a geographical expression and a cultural formation initiated as part of the imperial process by which Europe sutured the globe, and so established its distinctive identity in relation to rest of the world. The mapping of South Asia coincided with the formation of the West as a global enterprise, the latter signalled by the appropriation of the Americas, which, underwritten by imperial processes emanating from the peninsula on the western edge of the Asian continent, elaborated a gradual shift from the idea of Christendom to the idea of Europe, and introduced into the Americas various administrative categories of ‘non-Europeaness’ (e.g. ‘Indian’ for native Americans, ‘Negro’ for Africans) and proto-anthropological discourses of ‘race’ to govern and conceptualise human diversity (Wolf, 1982; Todorov, 1984; Rabasa, 1993).

Initially the presence of South Asia in Europe was contained in and spread through exotic commodities, fabulous legends and the embellished first hand experiences of a few hardy travellers. The entry of South Asia into the European imagination therefore was not an event like the appropriation of the Western hemisphere, in which an unknown landmass and its inhabitants were consumed by Europe. Many of the traits considered to be specifically South Asian were constituted by networks of trade, pioneered by the Portuguese. Early modern India, therefore, can be seen in terms of the ways in which control of the Indian Ocean passed from Islamicate and Chinese ships to Portuguese, Dutch and British fleets. The spices brought by the Portuguese from the Americas helped to define a global cuisine, which is now known perhaps too-unproblematically as Indian. The voyages of Vasco da Gama in effect inaugurate the beginning of the process by which South Asia becomes a looming presence on European horizons. Thus Portuguese voyages to Al-Hind coincide with the major transformation of European identity, in particular, the way in which racialised discourses emerged from the imperial establishment of ‘Europeaness’ and the colonial creation and rule of ‘non-Europeaness’ (Scammell, 1990; Wink, 1997).
The expansive migration and settlement of South Asians in Britain cannot be accounted for outside the context of the relationships established between Europe and South Asia in general and between post-Timurid India and the British Isles in particular. Indeed, Asian settlement is a postcolonial suffix to the colonial relationship between Britain and its Indian empire. This is one of the reasons why there has always been something distinctly colonial about modern Britishness racially exceeding the conventional parameters of its history and the official memory of its national institution. So when in 1997 the Union Jack was being lowered in a televised ceremony to publicise Hong Kong’s official return to China, the irony that it was only a hundred years ago that the British Empire was celebrating Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee seemed lost. The zenith of the British Empire came in the wake of the First World War, when it comprised 14 million sq km of the earth’s land surface (133 million sq km, including Antarctica) and ruled over approximately 400 million people (of which 322 million were to be found in its Indian dominions). The irony might be underlined by remembering the period between Pakistan and India’s independence in 1947 and the official decolonisation of Hong Kong, as fifty years of Britain resuming, with a postcolonial indifference, political and cultural developments in which its national and local meanings continued to be deeply marked by the combined and uneven effects of colonial, racial and multicultural formations. Of course the post-Second World War period is not usually remembered or conceived in this way, centring as it does on the upheavals and dislocations internal to the discontinuities that periodise the well-being and idealisations of Western democratic culture (principally Europe and the United States). In Britain it is conventional to speak of the post-war condition of labour shortages as the catalyst for migration from the colonies, without any consideration of the impact of coloniality, as a political and social culture, on Britain’s ‘nation-Empire’, as if nation and empire belonged to incommensurable temporaliy, polities and spaces. Were we to re-employ the usual sociological narrative implied here, endorsing the nation-empire separation, symptomatic of analyses that divorce national race-relations from global international relations, we would fail to see the British continuities of race, empire and nationalism across the twentieth century as a whole.

Here we want to point to three conjunctural dimensions around which our alternative postcolonial/coloniality narrative might be contrasted to the ubiquitous post-war/race-relations narrative. First, there was in the last half of the twentieth century, Britain’s redeployment within its cities

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1 This based on Taagapera (1978), but excluding the self-governing white dominions of Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.
and institutions of a liberal-colonial racism arising from the unanticipated, rapid unravelling of the British Empire, in which the colonial regulation of international relations became subsumed into the regulation of immigration and race relations within a liberal discourse that formally denounced the idea of racial superiority. Second, there were the creolising, hybridising effects of the social and cultural movements of migrations from South Asia, the Caribbean and West Africa which entrenched and transformed the ethnic-urban meanings of localities in major British cities, entangling idioms of Britishness in new forms of representation and contestation, greatly unsettling local white investments in the nation as a community racially unified in the imagination. Third, presiding over the shock waves of these developments were the indifferently postcolonial regimes of British institutions, whose implications in the post-war national commitment to the welfare state, full employment, peace and prosperity had also to contend with social challenges to housing, policing and education, posed by unrelenting, unsettling questions of racism and multiculturalism, flowing from imperial histories that greatly exceeded the narrow preoccupations of race-relations (Hesse, 2000). While the exact chronology of these shifts in British identity was far more confused and contradictory than is sketched here, its main contours are fairly clear, despite the attempt of revisionist historians to seek in the complexities and hesitancies associated with real historical phenomena the negation of the phenomena themselves (e.g. David Carradine, Niall Ferguson).

Continuing to invoke the term 'post-war' to describe the context and temporality of these events, reiterates a descriptor that is not only exhausted but also increasingly anachronistic. The end of the cold war ushered in the official demise of the so-called post-war period, displacing the bi-polar world characterised by the Soviet and US nuclear-armed empires, which were always the continuation of consequences of the Second World War by other means. Since then the question of the world order has been a frequent topic of debate, yet it continues to be underpinned by a Western imperium, both residual and renewable, with its hegemonic assumptions that there is no alternative to its basis of a world order. The passing of the cold war must now be understood as an interregnum, since European and American cultures of coloniality have clearly remained intact, albeit reframed, reformed and reformulated with regard to refugees and asylum seekers, Third World debt, anti-immigration, rogue states, global poverty, racial profiling, racist attacks, institutional racism, multiculturalism and the 'war on terror'. Therefore what we refer to as the postcolonial is not to be understood empirically as simply referring to the conventional etchings or endings of empire as a formal regime or set of institutions, but rather conceptually as a way of narrating the deregulated presences of past economic, political and cultural colonialities transformed within the postcolonial present to nat: and pc world: newed residu unsettI the co

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to naturalise and depoliticise the world order (e.g. the world economic and political hegemony of the United States and European Union; Third world poverty). In other words, the postcolonial describes the limitations and incompleteness of anterior decolonisation, and indicates renewed circumstances in which the challenge to resist and overcome the residuum and excess of coloniality continues to disturb, question and unsettle Western practices of normalising, disavowing and depoliticising the contemporary colonial architecture of the world order.

COLONIALITY

What we call European coloniality should not be confused with the formal existence of empires and colonies, as in references to colonialism, nor should its persistence be treated as something exempt from the American experience. For us the idea of coloniality points to a governmental cultural form or social regulatory process, assembled in formal and informal practices of ‘racial rule’ (Goldberg, 2002). Despite the liberal humanist commitments of the European Union and the United States, coloniality is routinely sustained in their deliberations, which enshrine the hegemonic authority of the West over the non-West, the moral high ground of Europeanness over non-Europeanness, and the global value of white populations over non-white populations. Such a Western spectacle (Hesse, 1999) overflows and exceeds the previous formal institutionalisation of Western empires (e.g. colonialism). In contemporary political, social, economic, legal and intellectual practices, the reflexes of European coloniality have become so normalised as to be complicit even with the apparent counter claims of Western liberal-democratic discourses. Despite any putative humanitarian gloss, coloniality expresses the languages, practices and relations that gave meaning to the kinds of distinctions, nuances, representations and interactions that culminated in the racially hierarchical and segregated formations of European empires across the world, including the United States. Coloniality, detached from the institutions of empire is particularly expressed, marked and initiated through the continuing associations of ‘race’, racism and multiculturalism with Western forms of governance and culturally occidentalist dominated representations (Venn, 2000). It can be read as symptomatic of Western regulatory formations, processes, knowledges and identities because it has congealed historically from the social transformation of colonised cultural differences into administered, inferiorised ‘Otherness’ (e.g. ‘savages’, ‘primitive’, ‘underdeveloped’, ‘minorities’). We cannot overestimate the historic transformation of the relation between coloniality and modernity because the Eurocentric (including the Americas) lineage of colonised ‘Otherness’ continues to be appropriated, exploited, interrogated, exoticised, infantilised and pathologised under the rubric of
international relations and race relations. Within these terms, an official postcoloniality subsists fraudulently, continuing to underwrite liberal-democratic administrations of racially polarised, gendered, sexualised ‘non-European-Otherness’. This, it must be understood, is not something that only occurs between the ‘West’ and the ‘non-West’, but also between ‘Europeanness’ (‘whiteness’) and ‘non-Europeanness’ (‘non-whiteness’) within the very contours and criteria defining and explaining the West to itself.

Our colonial reference to whiteness in parentheses should perhaps also be made explicit at this point. As Edward Said pointed out, the colonial relation meant the rule of the white man, it was a way of being in the world and appropriating that world. The ‘white man’ was a hegemonic disposition, a dominating cadre of comportments that made possible a specific authoritarian colonial cultural style: ‘Being a White Man was therefore an idea and a reality. It involved a reasoned position towards both the white and the non-white worlds. It meant—in the colonies—speaking in a certain way, behaving according to a code of regulations, and even feeling certain things and not others. It meant specific judgements, evaluations, gestures’ (Said, 1978: 227). In addition it meant embodying the administrative cultivation of ‘race’, in which policies implementing a governing form of racism, were indispensable attributes of the colonial authority, ascribed to the disposition and the orientation of the ‘white man’. As far as the lineage and legacy of coloniality is concerned, the modern, global, colonial way of being the ‘white man’ involved,

...the culturally sanctioned habit of deploying large generalisations by which reality is divided into various collectives: languages, races, types, colours, mentalities, each category being not so much a neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation. Underlying these categories is the rigidly binomial opposition of ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, with the former always encroaching upon the latter (even to the point of making ‘theirs’ exclusively a function of ‘ours’). (Said, 1978: 227)

This of course raises the question, to what extent and how does this symbology of whiteness remain relevant in relation to the non-West and the West’s designated non-white populations? In the move from the oscillations between the authoritarian and paternal imperialisms of formally recognised empires, to the humanitarian imperialism of the postcolonial era, the symbology of whiteness appears to have folded into an seemingly benign liberal-democratic universal culture.

Heuristically the failure to understand the contemporary meaning of coloniality has generated a great deal of uncertainty if not confusion about the meaning of the postcolonial in political terms. As a cultural intervention or intellectual practice, postcolonialism has been mainly associated with the field of literary and cultural studies, where it has referred contrastingly to influence, control, the field colonial history or the ‘geopolitical, so Charles’!

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referred to a genre of writing which reflected on the complex and often contradictory ways in which European empires shaped and continued to influence societies which, though no longer subject to direct imperial control, were haunted by the spectral resonances of empire, whether in the field of law, economy, polity or social institutions. When the postcolonial has been used to address political issues, for example the ‘right’ or the ‘good’, it has done so largely by being refracted through a cultural prism, seeing culture broadly as practices of representation defining what Charles Taylor has called in the context of multiculturalism, a ‘politics of recognition’ (Taylor, 1993). Thus the postcolonial analytic has tended to focus on politics as practices of cultural representation. Consequently, the political aspect of the postcolonial has often been found at points at which culture (as ethnic representations or ways of life) and politics (the domain of the state or the rule of law) converge, or, to be more precise, at the point at which cultural questions consume political questions (e.g. nationalism, so-called fundamentalism). While useful within the realms of cultural studies, this has left unattended transnational political questions of power and coloniality, which can only be summarised under the theme of interrupted decolonisation, as a persisting and relevant idea in the contemporary age. In this sense the postcolonial becomes an idiom for reflecting on the historical logics of decolonisation and mobilising its contemporary logics—if by decolonisation we understand both the removal and elimination of the forms of coloniality described above.

At least three contemporary logics of decolonisation that arise within the political prism of postcoloniality can be identified. The first can be described as decolonising the representations of the decolonised. Here coloniality is not understood so much in terms of material exploitation or political subordination, though these are conditions of its existence, but as an unaccountable organised structure of authoritative knowledge exerted over the formerly colonised and their descendents. The sense of coloniality used depics forms of power/knowledge that describe Western projects of mastering and regulating the ‘non-European’ world and communities comprising people of colour in terms of Eurocentric knowledges, representations and administrations. Decolonising the representations of the decolonised takes the form of a politics of interrogation (not recognition), where the objective is to expose, challenge, remove and eliminate hegemonic ‘white’/‘Western’ claims of the right to theorise and legitimate ‘non-Western’/‘non-white’ experiences of postcoloniality.2

The second logic can be described as decolonising representative decolonisation. Here coloniality is understood in terms of authorising and
allocating global resources, power, or what Anibal Quijano has referred to as the 'coloniality of power', which refers to the continued ways in which modern categories of citizenship, democracy and national identity are shaped by the unequal power differentials between 'European'/white' and 'non-European'/non-white' assemblages and comportments. Despite the eradication of juridical and political institutions of colonialism, colonial practices and discourses continue to proliferate across time and space on a global level, particularly under auspices of global capitalism. For us the logic of decolonisation here takes the political form of challenging and replacing the limited and inadequate previous processes of decolonisation in the political, juridical and economic arenas, particularly under the rubric of globalisation (e.g. candidates for decolonisation here range from the IMF, the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations to NATO). It also extends to striving for political and economic forms of cosmopolitan democracy, within and beyond Western nation-states, regulated globally by a transformation of unfair terms of trade imposed by the West to the detriment of the non-West.

The third logic can be described as decolonising the representatives of decolonisation. Here coloniality is understood in terms of what Homi Bhabha (1994) has described as liberal-colonial doubleness, in which coloniality extends as much to the liberal as to the colonial part of the institutions and discourses conjoined in this way. It questions the idea that the Western liberal institutions involved in inaugurating and administering the formal decolonising process are no longer involved in sustaining coloniality. Rather than accepting a radical discontinuity between metropole and colony, in terms of civilisation and barbarism, it understands, as Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton (1967) argued in the late 1960s, that something like institutional racism is very much associated with respected Western institutions and that it points to the persistence of coloniality. Here the logic of decolonisation takes the form of exerting coloniality from the liberal-democratic culture of Western nations themselves. The political in postcolonialism, or the political postcolonial should now be thought of as a series of reflections, conceptions, interventions, practices in the arena and analysis of decolonisation, ranged against the terms of resumed and renewed coloniality, mobilised for its continual eradication. The prospect of decolonisation becomes something akin to what Jamaica’s national poet Louise Bennet once ironically referred to as 'colonisation in reverse', in describing the migrations from the former colonies to the former imperial metropole. We should note, however, that it is not the exchange of the hegemonic and subaltern positions within the colonial hierarchy that is being signified by 'colonisation in reverse' but rather the critical reversal of the colonial relationship itself, its reversion and revision, not merely the swapping of positions within that relationship.
IMMIGRANTS

If we now return to considering the arrival of the ex-colonial ethnically marked 'immigrant' in the British metropole it should be seen immediately how postcoloniality confused the spatial and racial distinction between centre and periphery, nation and empire, citizen and native, and thus signalled the unsettling and unpredictable effects of an exceedingly provisional decolonisation of all the political, social and cultural manifestations made possible by the imperial enterprise. The ex-colonial 'immigrants' were pejoratively portrayed as bringing the Empire home, underlining the disavowed reality of the 'nation-empire', and in some quarters deeply resented for closing the gap that colonialism had opened up between liberal-democracy and its racial Other. The administrative machinery of what Couze Venn calls 'imperial governmentality' (in our terms racialised governmentality [Hesse and Sayyid, forthcoming]) began to assert itself in relation to the management of the presence of the ex-colonial 'immigrant' (Venn, 2000). Because the history of ex-colonial immigration to Britain is most often told in terms of the post-war labour shortage, which was to be filled by semi-skilled and unskilled labour from the Caribbean, South Asia and West Africa, we can easily lose sight of its deeply re-inscribed colonial dynamics. In these accounts, the movement of people is reduced to the working of an implacable economic logic, which transcends any particular embodiments, and works in a universal space, the invisible hand of the market, outside of historical processes or cultural formations. Invariably this sets in train a series of nationalised explanations (push-pull, chain migration) designed to account for the transfer of people from the edge of a contracting empire, the official moment of postcoloniality, to the war torn, battered and bombed heartlands of the officially designated post-war Britain. These host-community/immigrant-community accounts provide an overwhelmingly inadequate way of narrating the migratory and settlement experiences of ethnically marked postcolonial subjects across Britain; nevertheless they sustain the fictions in British public culture of a termination between the imperial past and the nationalist present, as well as of a structural and political separation between a racially unmarked indigenous British society and racially marked migrants who become carriers of cultures for British consumption or proscription.

What these official and media accounts cannot do is place these migrations within the history of postcoloniality. The absence of any analysis of the postcolonial condemns the stories of 'immigrants' to replay the colonial drama inscribed in various scenes of the 'immigrant' imaginary (Sayyid, 2004). Formed by the intersection of discourses organised around the figure of 'immigrant' as signifier of ex-coloniality, the 'immigrant' imaginary constitutes 'immigrants' as ontologically distinct, to
be celebrated as exotica or to be dismissed as being unworthy of specific representation. It projects a future in which the ‘immigrant’ minority will be indistinguishable from the national (i.e. ethnically unmarked) majority, but consecrates a present that permanently defers such a possibility. It tends to reduce social, political, cultural and economic changes within an ‘immigrant’ minority to generational conflict and succession. Generations emerge as the dominant analytical trope, used to mark out transformations, which see the immigrant process as the key component in changing the lives of ethnically marked populations. Routine-ised narratives, which cite the movement from first to second to third generation, are represented as containing self-evident explanations. Often portrayed with the certainty of biological processes, the generational movements of immigrants are depicted as analogous to a life cycle in which tadpoles eventually turn into frogs. While there is an argument to be made that age cohorts may in some contexts have sociological and political significance, it does not follow that the only transformations having significant impact on the ‘immigrant’ community result from their socialisation into the ‘host’ society. Here we have the dominant representation of the migratory experience always associating it with the importation of inscrutable cultures and bizarre practices from another time and distant lands, in which generational movement, from immigrant to citizen, seen as absorption into the British way of life, requires movement from Urdu and Hindi to Cockney and Brummie. Absorption, meaning being assimilated rather than assimilating, is seen as the only engine of transformation, where continued movement from one generation to another, particularly in terms of success or failure, becomes a significant anthropological if not biological predictor of future social behaviour.

On the face of it perhaps there is nothing new here. The ‘immigrant’ imaginary resembles in its emphasis the strategies and policies that were used to reconcile post-national minorities to the national majority during the early modern period of Europe’s successive waves of state formation and consolidation. Post-national ethnically marked populations arose as a result of being left out (for a variety of contingent historical reasons) of the process by which the Westphalian template of peoples, territories and government was institutionalised. The construction of national belongings often left some communities outside the process even when they were located within the boundaries of the nascent state-nation projects. Post-national communities tended to be either those ethnically marked populations that were unable to transform their ethnicity into a nationality (i.e. they were unable to build the bridge from cultural, linguistic ethnic community to political community armed with all technologies and powers of a state). For example, Bretons or Welsh or Sicilians could have easily become national majorities in their own state-nations. The second type of post-national group that failed to be accommodated in the initial process of being post-national were post-colonial groups living in a space important common drawing identity status of their communities and their forces and aspirations. His minority domestic or less are national past resonated did not in the nation as the national were ethnocentrised expansion of national pasties) and administrative economic absorption.

Unsurprisingly, of ethnicities national or not ready using the diverse course is and their are decided ex-colonial process. Social, political failure of forces since and existence of the context th
The Postcolonial Political and the Immigrant Imaginary 23

process of state sponsored projects of centralisation and nation-building were populations that can be loosely termed dispersed or nomadic (i.e. groups that were considered to be too territorially scattered and not having a specific dwelling—in today’s terminology, diasporas). The most important examples were the Roma people and the Jews. Post-national communities were constructed as minorities by the process of boundary drawing that saw the hegemonic group as a national majority. The minority status of ethnically marked populations was not simply a symptom of their demographic size, but reflected more closely an (im)balance of forces and resources between ethnically marked and unmarked populations. Historically the European domestication of post-national ethnic minorities has been protracted, often violent and authoritarian. Where domestication was successful it enabled the national majority to more or less absorb its ethnic minorities and produce a more or less unified national majority in which traces of the former ethnic minorities did not resonate significantly either politically, socially or economically. This did not mean, however, that all the ethnicised minorities dissolved but rather that they became accepted as a legitimate, de-ethnicised part of the national majority. Through such a process the French and the English were created from a number of different ethnicities. Post-national ethnicised minorities became part of the national majority, through the expansion of the process of nation-building. It was the establishment of national languages with national standards (rules of grammar, dictionaries), compulsory or wide-spread schooling, conscription, expanded administrative machinery, dislocations and relocations of national economies, which induced and coerced the domestication and eventual absorption of European ethnic minorities.

Unsurprisingly then the ‘immigrant’ imaginary articulates the arrival of ethnically marked ex-colonial people as another instance of the post-national minority thesis, hence postcolonial people become available if not ready to be domesticated and assimilated into the national fold by using the same techniques and practices that made nation-states out of diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic, economic groupings. The problem of course is that such a thesis cannot identify or countenance immigrants and their descendents as belonging to ethnic minority formations that are decidedly postcolonial, since the thesis cannot concede the idea that ex-colonial immigrant formations are not signifiers of the incomplete process of nation-building but are rather signifiers of the incomplete social, political and racial developments surrounding decolonisation. The failure of British politics to come to terms with these postcolonial conditions since the latter half of the twentieth century has led to mainstream and extremist discourses attributing many social problems to the presence of the ex-colonial ethnically marked populations. We place in this context the recurrent claim made by most mainstream politicians, even
by virtue of certain turns of phrase, that racialised exclusions and violations directed against people of colour is the product of their presence, or to put it in the vernacular, they were attacked or discriminated against because they are Asian. As absurd as it is common, this is one of the reasons always suggested for strict immigration control, that the presence of the racially Othered is the cause of racism. The index of racism is linked not with its routine rationalities and practices established within the lineaments of British imperial culture at home and abroad, but rather with the (ascribed) refusal of these postcolonial people to cross over into a national hearth of belongingness and absorption, thereby almost obliging the national ethnically unmarked majority to racially exclude, deride and violate the ethnically marked minorities.

What we can see from the postcolonial reframing of the cycle of ‘race relations’ in Britain are the limits and shallowness of many policy interventions around racism. It allows us to break with the primacy of the domestic in determining the proper responses to racism and its persistence, and clearly locates the decolonising impact of the ethnically marked. It has to be remembered that ethnic marking, the process of designating ethnic minorities and national majorities, is not a simple reflection of underlying realities, rather it is the product of a particular construction which has been foundational to the articulation of British identity. Attempts to re-articulate a British identity in the wake of ex-colonial settlement, loss of geopolitical prominence and the unravelling of the United Kingdom continue to founder upon the insistence that a serious consideration of the postcolonial be excluded from this. Consequently the presence of ex-colonial ‘immigrants’ becomes a symptom of the failure of British identity to reconstitute itself following the loss of empire, the ravages of the hot war, the end of the cold war and the return of the depoliticised colonial world order. If the ‘immigrant’ imaginary helps to prevent the incomplete decolonisation of the British Empire from becoming the effective postcolonisation (recolonisation?) of Britain, it is because it also represents the postcolonial condition as something that happens to other people in other places. This may become clearer if we turn our attention to what might be described as the postcolonial understanding and response to racism.

POSTCOLONIAL RACISM

Reviewing or re-reading the migratory postcolonial experience is now crucial to understanding and contesting the British incidence and impact of racism. In recent years, for all the welcome liberal discussion about ‘race’ in the social sciences and humanities, the tendency has been to collapse race into a sign of ethnicity or difference rather than to invoke an interrogation of racism. The idea of ‘race’ has generally been detached from the acknowledgment of the entry lexicon of the racialisation of institutional racism. Perhaps the social and political resources of the early 1970s a Nationalist and nationalist projects were abo
from the idea of racism, though bizarrely in some instances it has to be acknowledged that discussions of race have often masqueraded for discussions of racism. It should be acknowledged that since the late 1990s the entry of a nationally invoked ‘institutional racism’ into the political lexicon of the public sphere momentarily suggested that some things were about to change even though British public culture had enormous difficulty both understanding and accepting it. Nevertheless the advent of institutional racism as an object of redress for public policy proved to be a false dawn. Racism is still not something that is seen to merit national government discussion like privatisation, education, global warming or the National Health Service; there is as yet, no war against racism. Despite the long traditions of black, BrAsian and generally anti-racist struggles across its major cities, British public culture continues to have great difficulty accepting that racism is as British as liberalism and as institutional as nationalism. Where both liberalism and nationalism have British histories and institutional force, it would seem British public culture has felt racism is a different kind of phenomena, that it is more recent perhaps, of less sure footing and certainly not a formative part of the British experience. Although Britain has a small but honourable tradition of political activists, community workers, journalists and academics striving to expose and explain the impact of racism across social life, the effect on British public culture has always been negligible. Atlantic slavery, British colonialism or Western imperialism were instrumental in shaping what contemporary Britain inherits and understands as nationalism and liberalism. Yet in the fields of knowledge regularly and conventionally produced in and disseminated through the public culture, racism is somehow exempted from these historical and social formations.

Perhaps part of the answer lies further afield. Any acknowledgement of racism in the public domain appears to be understood less as having the social morphology of liberalism and nationalism, and more as having the psychological attributes of irrationality, hatred, superstition and prejudice. The mainstream attitude had been to associate these presumed psychological associations with the impact of post-1945 immigration and the contested emergence of race-relations in the context of scarce resources or competition for resources. Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s this media view easily prevailed, with little or no sustained exposure for the concerns of black and BrAsian communities in the local and national media. For a brief moment in the late 1970s and mid 1980s a more public and direct anti-racist network of ideas, movements and campaigns managed to place racism, rather than prejudice, on various local public and national agendas. The riots in Brixton, Southall and Toxteth in 1981 and Tottenham and Handsworth in 1985 introduced middle England to the local idea of racism, the problem of policing and the robust presence of black and BrAsian communities. More than this, in
cities like London, Birmingham and Liverpool the concept of a *locally invoked* institutional racism was added to the exigencies of urban anti-racist lexicons, though not the national concerns of a parliamentary vocabulary. Despite some gestures to social change and some useful equal opportunity developments introduced in local government, the voluntary sector and the police, by the beginning of the 1990s racism was no longer an issue that could be raised publicly, even in the watered down version of prejudice. Although the so-called Rushdie Affair, symbolised by television pictures of a staged book burning in Bradford and a gathering of mass prayers in Hyde Park, heralded the media's discovery of large Muslim communities in Britain, this tended to promote a media and political obsession with understanding cultural diversity rather than racism. British public culture stood outside and hovered above the fray that had not entered it (Hesse, 2000, 2004b).

It was not that the problems of racist attacks, racist policing, racism in employment, education, immigration and health had diminished. During the greater part of the 1990s they simply continued to be relegated to what the imagined British community chose not to imagine about itself. The racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, one of many at the beginning of the 1990s, managed to change what the nation could talk about in relation to racism, but only after a long public campaign had been undertaken and a change of government allowed an official inquiry to be set up. The report produced by the Macpherson inquiry declared for the first time nationally that institutional racism was a problem in Britain. But the imagined community still had one problem; apart from arriving at an understanding of institutional racism, it had to understand where it came from, how it got here. The concept of institutional racism had entered a public domain that had no specification of a history or cultural formation in which it could be located (Hesse, 2004b). This gave rise to a Macpherson definition of institutional racism in terms of unwittingness, unintended consequences and organisational failures in policy, all of which could continue to be explained in the time-honoured, more comfortable terms of prejudice, immigration and race-relations established since 1945.

Nevertheless, some things did change. The accelerated globalisation of the 1990s, the end of the cold war and the end of apartheid effectively brought to a close the developments and discourses that had traditionally defined the post-war period as a period. Britain had become a significant, if at times reluctant, player in the neo-liberal economic and federal expansion of the European Union. The 1992 removal of internal immigration barriers across the Union compromised the vernaculars of British national identity with European cosmopolitanism, while the increasing prominence in social life of asylum seekers and refugees began the expansion and redefinition of the British template of nationalist and racist
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mobilisation. At the same time Britain became a captive audience to a socially mainstreamed passion for all things culturally diverse. Through sports, music, cinema, the fashion industry and business, especially the food industry, the cultivated lure of a multicultural Britain revolutionised the images of advertising, broadcasting and entertainment. Since the ethnic look and ethnic looking came in somewhere in the last third of the 1990s, neither has ever looked back. At the same time, there were still influentially hysterical elements in the popular press and restrained versions in the political discourse of Government, which continued to resent and traduce the ethnically or racially marked foreigner in our midst.

At times overwhelming the ethnic love and hate fest was the emergence of a global Muslim subjectivity, which by the beginning of the twenty-first century was officially indicted if not proscribed by the rise of the ‘war on terror’, which intentionally or not chose the reflex of following the contours of a colonial undertaking. East continued to be East and West: Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and North Korea (the ‘axis of evil’) now all resemble colonial problems to be resolved through ‘Empire’ (Hardt and Negri, 2001) or the ‘Western conglomerate state’ (Shaw, 2000), both inside and outside the West. Hence the British position of Asian communities, as postcolonial people, particularly those marked by Muslim affiliations, intimacies or resemblances, are not so easily separated from the racial profiling emanating from policing strategies associated with the ‘war on terror’. Such a postcolonial presence cannot be explained outside the rupturing of the membrane, which separated metropole from periphery, or the space of law and peace from the space of violence and chaos. The intrusion of the periphery into metropole (which is, as we noted, constitutive of the postcolonial condition) can no longer be contained within the interior of the metropolitan nation-states. ‘Race-relations’ which have for far too long been conceived as matters of domestic policy are being subverted by the increasing difficulty of sustaining the act of spacing that divides it from international relations; the myth of the national majority historically and politically distinct from developments surrounding the ethnically marked and colonially overdetermined minority should now be laid to rest. Indeed what amounts to a subversion of the colonial idea of ‘race relations’ draws attention to the genealogical formation of contemporary racism in the context of a world polarised and policed as the ‘West’ over the ‘non-West’, ‘Europe’ over ‘non-Europe’, ‘white’ over ‘non-white’ that is often surrounded by official silence.

PARADOXICAL RACISM

It is necessary to recall that racism as a critical concept first emerges in the 1930s to describe the experiences of people of Jewish heritage living
under the racial laws imposed by the newly elected Nazi government (Fredrickson, 2001). However, the Nuremberg Laws, the Nazi political programme and the associated legal and extra-legal practices had a strong family resemblance to what was going on throughout the rest of the world as colonialism, in which European settlers or administrators regulated the conduct of what were deemed to be 'non-European' peoples. The colonial frame here refers not only to the empires of the British, French and Dutch etc., but also to the ‘inner’ empires, in which European settlers confronted indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australasia, as well as the Africans who were enslaved and the Indians who were pressed into indentured servitude. Given the homology between racial practices in Nazi Germany and normalised practices in the rest of the world subject to European coloniality, it is worth asking what circumstances motivated the invention and formulation of racism as a concept describing German imperial practices across Europe, especially when these practices resembled those carried out by European authorities in the colonised territories? Each one of the racialised techniques of social exclusion, segregation, demonisation, marginalisation and violence was already operating under the rule of coloniality. Concentration camps, discriminatory legal codes, repression through native collusions, clandestine or semi-official systems of violations, none of these were new to European political culture in the colonies (Du Bois, 1947; Cesaire, 1955). If anything, the innovations of the Nazis lay in the efficiencies achieved in their excesses, the industrialisation and bureaucratic systematisation of the killing process (Bauman, 1989). Indeed in the decade after the Holocaust, both the French in Algeria and the British in Kenya (Anderson, 2005) continued and escalated their range of brutal, vicious colonial practices in their efforts to sustain colonial rule against indigenous anti-colonial movements. In many ways what was radical about fascism was not its precise meaning, but its dislocation of the Europe/Empire divide: fascism was colonialism re-applied to Europe (Cesaire, 1955; Du Bois, 1947; Mazower, 1999). All of this begs the historical question as to why these resemblances were not sufficient to motivate usage of European colonialism as a concept describing Nazi governmental practices? Or conversely, why was it that the newly formulated concept of racism was not systematically and generally applied to European colonial practices in India and Africa? The answers are conceptual, ideological and political. Broadly, concepts induce reflection on marked relations between different aspects of reality, which pass unnoticed and undistinguished from the flow of everyday experiences or freely available empirical descriptions, unless brought into concentrated focus as an abstracted, condensed idea. To conceptualise some things in particular is often not to conceptualise other things in particular, it defines an ideological orientation. The 1930s concept of racism, accredited and taken up by the European powers and
The United States after the Second World War, despite the opprobrium it placed on the biologisation of the ‘race’ idea, was only a partial discrediting of its politicisation. In politically denying European colonial resemblances in German dreams of imperium, the indictment of racism was detached from any indictment of European coloniality. It thereby preserved the latter’s routine governmental forms for the continuities of colonial relations in both international relations and race-relations, where administratively ‘race’ became normalised and depoliticised.

Perversely this undoubtedly Eurocentric concept of racism (Hesse, 2004a, 2004b) emerged to account for the misapplication of coloniality in the heartlands of Europe and to peoples of European physiognomy and comportment (i.e. assimilated European Jewish populations), in effect conceptualising it as a pathological as opposed to a normalised coloniality (which was always reserved for the natives). Although the circulation of something as indictable as racism has in the second half of the twentieth century provided many social moments and political struggles with a significant basis for analysis and mobilisation, the hegemonic inflections of the concept suggested that racism was an exceptionalist form of an extreme ideology beyond the pale of even colonial Western culture (Hesse, 2004a). The circulation of the concept of racism as ideology marked the disavowal of the violence of normalised Western colonialism and the reinforcement of the ascribed moral and political distinction between Europe and non-Europe, the West and the rest, white and non-white, centre and periphery. The ideology of racism, symbolised in the political experiments and fantasies of the Nazis, became in the Western imaginary the template for the racial ‘state of exception’. The idea of the state of exception describes those circumstances under which the juridical order is suspended and emergency powers or martial law, or governmental powers unbound by existing law, are exercised (Agamben, 2005). By analogy racism, in being articulated with the inscription of fascism, was defined as extremist politics. Unlike anything with the democratic credentials of Western culture or the British way of life, it was designated as the constituent of a state of exception. This conceptualisation of racism as exceptionalist ideology had global ramifications. It privileged the understanding of racism as an issue of national domestic policy. In other words, the critique of racism addresses the problematic of the regulation of ethnically marked ‘minorities’. The operating theatre of racism became the nation-space, hence the speed with which issues of immigration become racialised, problematised and contested. The conceptual containing of racism within the nation-state-space meant that those subject to racism have always had limited options, since they could not outflank the racial order by evoking transnational/diasporic alliances; the sovereign primacy of the Western plutocratic nation state prevents such challenges to the global racial order. In addition it occludes the
indictment of any intrinsic colonial relationship between racism and democracy or liberal and colonial state assemblages. These designs which continue to underpin Western polities have been constructed as the basis of the world order and have become normalised as the property of international relations, even where they are sometimes exposed as structures of the colonial hierarchy that orders the planet. The split between coloniality (international governance) and racism (nationalist ideologies) is not necessarily the product of different meanings but rather the different spaces in which they are deployed, such that the split is another means by which the spacing between West and the Non-West (and its analogies in 'European'/non-European', 'white'/non-white') becomes constitutive of the Western representation and domination of the world through international relations and race-relations. Of course one of the most prominent ways in which this constitutive split is represented is through the undecidable figure of the BrAsian, the racialised ex-colonial 'immigrant' who stands betwixt and between citizen and foreigner, a colonial past and a national present, West and 'non-West', one of us or one of them.

The establishment of 'immigrant' communities in Britain has occurred in the context of an unsettling, ambivalent and interrupted postcolonial transformation of the West. The colonial continuity of race-relocated regimes and formations has obliged BrAsians like other 'immigrants' to bridge the divide between West and the 'non-West'. The pioneer BrAsians were often people whose formative years passed in the crucible of the anti-colonial struggle. They were often the first South Asians for a hundred years to witness a South Asia in which British rule had receded from the horizon. They arrived in Britain during a period of global turmoil, itself the product of anti-colonial movements in the Third World and the civil rights movement in the United States. They arrived in a Britain that had won a world war at the cost of losing its empire and its place in the world. Their arrival coincided with, and to some extent contributed to, what has been described as the 'de-centring of the West' (Young, 1990; Sayyid, 2003a). In circumstances in which the capacity of the Western enterprise to project itself as the destiny of humanity is weakened, being BrAsian does not necessitate conformity to the disciplinary matrix of the 'immigrant' imaginary.

Clearly we have come a long way since the narrative of post-war migration to Britain, race-relations and the multicultural society were quickly ushered in to aid and abet not only the 'forgetting of empire' (Hall, 2000a) but the disavowal of its incomplete decolonisation, perpetuated in the postcolonial condition. If the break with the post-war paradigm is to be complete, and the postcolonial paradigm to emerge, we will need to re-think some of the claims made for the political formation of the
post-war period, particularly where the presence of postcolonial people point to a very different account. The post-war paradigm was in part held together by the Western eulogising of liberal democracy and its defeat of fascism, together with the symbolic discrediting of racism sutured to fascism and nationalism, excluding the credibility of any suggestions of racism's organic link with the articulation of liberalism and coloniality evident in the European empires. In nations like Britain and throughout the West the need for new forms of postcolonial governance is urgent; such a need is unlikely to be met as long as the dream of re-establishing the certainties of coloniality remains the policy option of choice in both international relations and race-relations. Alas, it is difficult to see how there can be colonial solutions to postcolonial problems.