

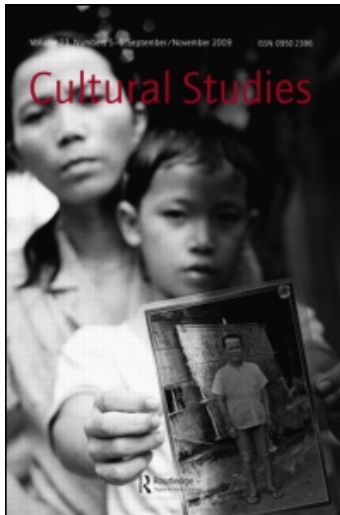
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Hazel V. Carby

BECOMING MODERN RACIALIZED SUBJECTS

Detours through our pasts to produce
ourselves anew

This essay is a close engagement with the work of Stuart Hall which has been central to the project of unraveling the complexities of difference, divisions in history, consciousness and humanity, embedded in the geo-political oppositions of colonial center and colonized margin, home and abroad, and metropole and periphery. Hall has exposed the temporal enigma that haunts the relation between colonial and post-colonial subject formation. In response, the essay focuses on the geo-politics rather than the linear temporality of encounters in an examination of the sources of tension, contention and anxiety that arise as racialized subjects are brought into being through narration in examples drawn from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano and post-colonial Caribbean novelists. The essay concludes by positing an alternative narrative for the emergence of the modern racialized state in Britain, one that has its origins in official responses to the presence of black American troops and West Indian civilian and Royal Air Force (RAF) personnel on British soil during World War II, rather than to the Caribbean migrants who arrived on the Empire Windrush in 1948.

Keywords British Empire; cultural identities; diaspora; Englishness; Olaudah Equiano; Stuart Hall

Part one

identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed.
(Hall 1995, p. 13)

... culture is not just a voyage of rediscovery, a return journey. It is not an 'archeology.' Culture is a production. It has its raw materials, its resources, its 'work of production.' It depends on a knowledge of tradition as 'the changing same' and an effective set of genealogies. But what this 'detour through its pasts' does is to enable us, through culture, to produce ourselves anew, as new kinds of subjects. It is therefore not a question of what our traditions make of us so much as what we make of our traditions. Paradoxically, our cultural identities, in any finished form, lie ahead of us. We are always in the process of cultural formation. Culture is not a matter of ontology, of being, but of becoming.

(Hall 2005, p. 556)

In this essay I will meditate upon the narration of encounters within which and through which we are brought into being as racialized subjects. Stuart Hall has argued that 'identity is always in part a narrative', that identity exists 'always within representation' (1997b, p. 49). I want to consider the creative, contested, contradictory and laborious work of constructing racial identities in narrative acts. My examples are drawn from varied historical moments but what each narrative has in common is that the racialized self is invented in the process of an encounter, produced, in other words, as a subject dialogically constituted in and through its relation to an other or others. While not attempting to create a genealogy that could, in any way, be considered complete or sufficient, I have turned to narratives which work to produce racialized subjects in a variety of different ways. Each encounter is 'structured in dominance' (Hall 1980, p. 305) and while thinking about how 'relations of subjugation manufacture subjects' (Foucault 2003, p. 45), I will translate my consideration of subjugation from Michel Foucault's frame into an investigation of the production and reproduction of unequal power relations and the 'manufacture of subjects' through narration.

We live with and in the midst of the consequences of the multiple histories of the formation and re-formation of a 'highly exclusive and exclusivist [English] cultural identity' (Hall 1997a, p. 20), though the multiple ways in which its creation and re-creation is haunted by and dependent upon the invention of the black other has been forgotten, repressed and denied. What is at stake is what we will make of our cultural identities in the future but, because I believe that in order to be able to 'make ourselves anew' we need to undertake critical 'detours' into the past, I begin by returning to *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1794/2001), and then quickly traverse a variety of narrative places, spaces and times in each of which I find a particular form of 'creative friction' in the representation of unequal encounters (Tsing 2005, pp. 4–5). The multiple histories and consequences of struggles over the production of English or British cultural identity remain as 'stone age traces' (Gramsci 1971, p. 323) in the modern racialized state which Britain becomes

during World War II and its immediate aftermath, which is where this essay concludes.¹

'Theory,' Hall has argued, 'is always a detour on the way to something more important' (1997b, p. 42). 'Becoming Modern' is in close dialogue with many of Hall's essays but in particular: 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities' (1995); 'When was "the Post-colonial?:" Thinking at the Limit' (1996); 'The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity' (1997a); 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities' (1997b) and 'Thinking the Diaspora: Home Thoughts from Abroad' (2005). The ways in which I think about issues of 'race,' and ethnicity in general, however, have been shaped by the entire corpus of Hall's work, not only those essays which directly address processes of racialization. The extraordinarily rich proliferation of ideas, political insights and historical paradigms, developed in the long engagement with Marxist theory to be found in Stuart Hall's publications and lectures, signpost the 'detour' I have travelled for my entire academic and activist career. Hall's political commitment and vision and, above all, his political and intellectual integrity is the base line in the rhythm of my walk.

My current project, tentatively titled, *Child of Empire*, interweaves memory and history in its narrative of racial encounters. I want to avoid the pitfalls of the binary thinking, the polarities of opposition and difference, that have dominated historical narratives of the workings of empire and its subjects, polarities which have not only maintained but also reproduced inequities of knowledge and power. Instead, I have been thinking about both the particularities and the commonalities in experience and history across and within the colonial boundaries of empire that manichean divisions and hierarchies of supposed racial difference cannot acknowledge. I turn to Hall's work to help me unravel the knotty complexities of difference, divisions in history, consciousness and humanity, that are intertwined in the geo-political oppositions of colonial center and colonized margin, home and abroad, and metropole and periphery. Imperial and racist calculations based on these divisions have determined which subjects and societies will be regarded as modern and which societies and subjects should be relegated to the status of in need of modernization.

'When was "the Post-colonial?:" Thinking at the Limit' (Hall 1996) seeks 'to explore the interrogation marks which have begun to cluster thick and fast around the question of 'the post-colonial' and the notion of post-colonial times'. It opens with a series of questions that I have been pondering since it was published. Hall asks:

If post-colonial time is the time *after* colonialism, and colonialism is defined in terms of the binary division between the colonisers and colonised, why is post-colonial time *also* a time of difference? What sort

of 'difference' is this and what are its implications for the forms of politics and for subject formation in this late-modern moment?

(Hall 1996, p. 242)

As Hall has warned, the post-colonial is a concept which 'could take us on a detour through a conceptual labyrinth from which few travellers return' (2000, p. 213) a detour I address elsewhere (Carby 2007). What follows in this essay is a response to the temporal enigma that haunts these questions and an exploration of the sources of tension, contention and anxiety in the process of constituting subjects through difference.

As I see it, Hall's questions are asking us to reconsider not only issues of difference but also, implicitly, how we conceive of time (and consequently history) in relation to difference. In 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity' Hall pointed to 'the novel and radical ways' in which Gramsci conceptualizes 'the *subjects* of ideology'. Hall argues that Gramsci,

altogether refuses an idea of a pre-given unified ideological subject – for example, the proletarian with its 'correct' revolutionary thoughts or blacks with their already guaranteed current anti-racist consciousness. He recognizes the plurality of selves or identities of which the so-called 'subject of thoughts and ideas is composed.' He argues that this multifaceted nature of consciousness is not an individual but a collective phenomenon, a consequence of the relationship between 'the self' and the ideological discourses which compose the cultural terrain of a society. 'The personality is strangely composite' he observes. It contains 'Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history . . . and intuitions of a future philosophy . . .'

(Hall 1986, p. 22)

It is the composite nature of the creation of the subject in narrative that I wish to capture, looking for the simultaneous imagining of past, present and possible future triggered in my examples by movement or migration, forced or voluntary. We need to be alert to the occasions when racialized subjects not only step into the recognitions given to them by others but provide intuitions of a future in which relations of subjugation will (could) be transformed, even if the present of the narrative is dislocated in time from decolonization and post-colonial movements and formations. Do not we attempt to 'emancipate our selves from metal slavery,' (Marley 1980) in incomplete or uneven fits and starts out of synch with the formation of emancipatory social and political movements? How do these intuitions of human possibility and complexity erupt into narrative acts? What status do we give to attempts to surmount our racialization when we write ourselves into an imaginative liberty of sorts?

Obviously, I am shifting and displacing Hall's arguments and Gramsci's analysis onto a creative and imaginative terrain, an invented or re-imagined

landscape, temporality and space of relations brought into being through storytelling. But, then, I teach literature rather than sociology. I am re-wording Hall's questions to consider what sort of 'difference' exists in the creative articulation of the racialization of a subject and to tease out the political implications of the type of narrative subject being invented. Understanding 'race as a relationship and not a thing' (Tabili 1994, p. 4) applies equally to the difference adhering to the colonial and post-colonial. If the temporal and spatial terms of the colonial relation between oppressor and oppressed are significantly defied, challenged or reconfigured in imaginative acts is this evidence of the emergence or intuition of a post-colonial consciousness even if this defiance, challenge or reconfiguration takes place in the eighteenth century?

I always argue that it is important to think historically, to be historically grounded, but I do not think that the proliferation of posts that embroider our contemporary critical and theoretical vocabulary necessarily signals historical thinking, in fact I do not think that a simple before and after adequately captures what these rapidly multiplying posts signal. (To the terms I have already cited we could add post-feminist and post-race to see that it is a political turn that is being reference not periodicity.) I want to suggest that an exclusive concentration on the linearity of temporality pushes other possible modes of interpretation and definition to the side. What could we gain by focusing on the geo-politics of encounters, the where in addition to the when, of subject formation? Is it possible to use terms like modern, or post-colonial to denote actions, activities, and actors, in the context of forced or voluntary migrations in very different historical circumstances?

We have invented or imagined temporal, spatial and geo-political boundaries between the multiple conceptual terrains of the colonial, the post-colonial, modernity, and the late modern (the late modern being, as I see it, a temporal frame within which we can still talk about the formation of subjects, a process that the post-modern has abandoned or rejected). But I want to re-imagine these boundaries as liminal, fluid and porous and I find that Hall's work enables me to think of these conceptual terrains as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive. Do linear or progressive notions of temporality have to determine or frame how we think about post-coloniality or can we think in terms that pre-suppose that formations of the modern racialized subject erupt into, interrupt and disrupt the binary nature and supposed linearity of discursive articulations of the colonial and post-colonial?

At which moments and in which texts can we see a modern black subject narrated onto the stage of a global history? How is that figure brought into being through narration and what are the terms and conditions that shaped or determined its modernity? Is what we conceive of as the modern subject produced out of the encounter between Africans and Europeans in search of profit? Is what we understand as a modern subject *de facto* a racial or racialized

subject and is this racialization the sign or marker of its modernity? Are the categories of black and white, African and European, brought into being through this commerce? If so, which of these subjects is made modern in the economics of the transaction: the African, or the European, or both? Does it matter where encounters between Africans and Europeans, between those constructed as 'black' and 'white' take place: in an African or English village, town, or city; if they occur in the impenetrable and claustrophobic darkness of the dungeon of a coastal fort or hold of a slave ship, or take place, face-to-face, in the glaring light reflected from the Atlantic Ocean; if they are confrontations on the shores of a Caribbean island or on the streets of a metropolitan imperial city? Perhaps it is not, in fact, only the place that is significant but also the manner of the journey and arrival, the eager walking or manacled stumble, the panicked flight, or forced or voluntary sailing toward and away from each other. How do we take political account of the biomechanics of movement between and among places, spaces and peoples, the scattering that results in the racialized modern encounter? Is it then, finally, the geo-politics or the bio-politics of these violent transactions that produces modernity and its subjects?

Part two

identity is not only a story, a narrative which we tell ourselves about ourselves, it is stories which change with historical circumstances. And identity shifts with the way in which we think and hear them and experience them. Far from only coming from the still small point of truth inside us, identities actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition.

(Hall 1995, p. 8)

In 1789, the publication of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, and its many reprints, made its author 'the first successful professional writer of African descent in the English-speaking world (Caretta 2005, p. 366). In the first two chapters readers are told of Equiano's forced abduction from his home, his journey to the African coast and transportation in chains across the Atlantic Ocean. Stating that he was born in what is now Southern Nigeria in 1745, Equiano records that he had 'never heard of white men or Europeans, nor of the sea' in his village (Equiano 1794/2001, p. 20).² In the second chapter of the *The Interesting Narrative* Equiano is kidnapped along with his sister (who remains nameless) and both are enslaved.

While the overwhelming majority of *The Interesting Narrative* is 'remarkably consistent with the historical record,' Vincent Caretta, author of the most

recent biography of Equiano, states that Equiano's baptism certificate of February 1759 and his naval records of 1773 reveal that he was, in fact, born in South Carolina (Caretta 2005, pp. xvi, 2)³ If 'the available evidence suggests that [its] author . . . may have invented rather than reclaimed an African identity', how do we respond to the first two chapters of *The Interesting Narrative* which are, along with his account of the Middle Passage, 'the most frequently excerpted sections'? Do we label them 'historical fiction' as Caretta does and leave it at that? (2005, pp. xiv, xii). Werner Sollers has argued that if Equiano turned out to be 'one of the very first black American expatriates in Europe . . . [it would] require a new interpretation of the *Narrative*' (Sollers 2001, p. xxi).

Perhaps we will never know, for sure, on which side of the Atlantic Equiano was born but would the information definitively determine how the narrative is to be read? Even if he was born on the African continent is not Equiano still turning to 'invention' to create an African identity? And, if he was born in the New World, cannot we also argue that Equiano is 'reclaiming' an African identity? Should not our interpretation of the first chapters of *The Interesting Narrative* be asking what meaning is produced in these processes of invention and reclamation? While the debate about the status of the first two chapters rages, whether they are autobiographical, an 'identity in the past to be found', or fiction, I would rather avoid the either/or of these questions and ask, instead, what these chapters produce, examining them as providing the raw materials and resources out of which Equiano creates a 'return journey' and 'genealogy' (Hall 2005, p. 556) in order to write 'a history of the present' (Foucault 1984, p. 178). I will argue that Equiano's 'detour through the past' enables him to produce himself anew, as a new kind of subject.

What does Equiano make out of the tradition he constructs? First, Equiano is writing into a present that is increasingly interested in 'accounts of travelers to the continent [of Africa], most of whom were associated with the slave trade.' Much of this interest, however was purient, a fascination with stories of a savage land without culture or history. Equiano dispells such mythologies as he creates a travelogue of his own and enters the debate about the slave trade. I would argue that these are not separate enterprises for the aspects of *The Interesting Narrative* that most resemble the genre of the travelogue and which are enriched by Equiano's wide reading of accounts of Africa, are completely integrated with the anti-slavery politics of the text. For, unlike the authors he read, in Equiano's account the subject undertakes his long and perilous journey toward the African coast *as property*: a journey punctuated by his being sold numerous times to, and working for, various masters. During this journey Equiano is separated from, briefly reunited with and then again separated from, his sister, a figure who remains nameless and is never brought into being as a conscious subject through narration. Standing only as a severed last link with family and the place from which Equiano came, the figure of 'sister' is not

a subject in her own right but merely register of, or signifier for, Equiano's condition as singular, abducted male, an orphan who will be reborn in the course of the narrative.

Equiano travels through what are described as various 'nations and people' with whom he feels comfortable and who have 'manners, customs, and language' that resemble his own. He acquires fluency in a range of dialects. If the first stage of estrangement is the loss of the signifier, sister, the second stage begins when Equiano,

came at length to a country, the inhabitants of which *differed* from us in all those particulars [of manners, customs, and language]. I was very much struck with this difference, especially when I came among a people who did not circumcise, and ate without washing their hands. They cooked also in iron pots, and had European cutlasses and cross bows, which were unknown to us, and fought with their fists among themselves.

(Equiano 1794/2001, p. 37, emphasis added)

Difference enters the text at this moment and is marked not only as difference in culture, 'manners, customs, and language,' but as a difference inscribed on the body. This somatic difference is narrated in conjunction with the appearance of European influence, a presence marked not by its people but through the technology of war, and this influence is associated with the first evidence in the narrative of contentious human relations.

Can we read this account of an encounter with somatic and cultural difference, the presence of technology, and evidence of conflict, as the register of modernity in the narrative? It is an intuition of what is to follow but although Equiano is disturbed by these strangers and their practices, they are still, to him, people. Difference, at this point in the narrative is presented as a variation within the familiar, if a somewhat dramatic variation. While Equiano refuses the invitation to be inducted into this community through the ritual scarification of his body, the offer to make and mark his body in their likeness is recognized as a gesture of inclusion from strangers, an explicit recognition of shared peoplehood. At this point *The Interesting Narrative* reads as a travelogue educating Equiano's readers in the positive aspect of the diversity of the continent (Wheeler 2000, p. 275).

Six or seven months after his abduction from his home Equiano reaches the coast, an area described as being devoted to colonial agricultural production and the arts of war. It is at this point in the *Narrative*, I would argue, that Equiano is forcibly inducted into modernity as a subject. He describes what he sees in the following words:

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into

terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.

(Equiano 1794/2001, pp. 38–39)

The sections we have read up to this point in the text seem as carefully crafted stages of preparation for this encounter, an encounter which I am calling modern and which initiates the stages of Equiano's transformation into a racialized subject. What are its characteristics?

Equiano steps into the place of the recognitions given to him by others. The narrative self is not recognized as a self by the beings Equiano confronts, a recognition and confirmation that the self is no longer human but is tossed about and categorized as 'cargo' by those who see and handle him. However, this process of dehumanization is represented by Equiano as being mutual: Equiano regards the beings he confronts, the beings that deny him his humanity, as being non-human or unhuman; he visualizes them as 'bad spirits', as representing death in its undead form. Terror and anguish follow Equiano's realization of the fragility, vulnerability and possible annihilation of the self, and movement, speech and consciousness cease, registering his symbolic death.

The moment of this mutual non-recognition of the other as fully human is precisely and simultaneously the first moment in the *Narrative* that bodies become 'ours' and 'theirs', not merely differentiated but racialized, a racialization which seems, on the surface, to become the yardstick of affiliation and allegiance. This is the first time in his account that Equiano divides people into a binary structure of two opposing groups: the crew and the multitude, the former referred to as 'white' and the latter as 'black'. 'When I recovered a little', Equiano states when he returns to consciousness, 'I found some *black* people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay. . . I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those *white* men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair' (Equiano 1794/2001, p. 39, emphasis added). But, of course, this

categorization of peoples is being imagined and recreated by Equiano within the terms of 1789 Britain.

Equiano's affiliations will not always be based on a politics of the body as *The Interesting Narrative* runs its course.⁴ Roxanne Wheeler has shown how variable and fluid Equiano's use of skin color is throughout the text which 'underscores that black complexion is a way of experiencing the world rather than a way of statically *being* in the world determined by climate, customs or physical features' (2000, p. 274). Yet, it is in Equiano's reconstruction of one particular space, the deck of a slave ship at anchor on the Atlantic coast of the African continent, that bodily difference is established as the signature of a break in the process of recognizing the other as human. I want to argue that it is the recognition of this break which is a mark of conscious entry of the subject into modern western racialized discourse: the point at which Equiano steps into the place of recognition which others have given him.

In the *Interesting Narrative* Equiano was not black in the place in which he grew up. Nor did he see himself as African. Although enslaved, Equiano was not black or African at any point on his journey toward the Atlantic coast, but he is represented as becoming black *in the encounter* with the crew of the slave ship who, simultaneously with their refusal to recognize a shared humanity with Equiano, become white. The African, or black subject, and the European, or white subject, are produced in mutual relations of affiliation/disaffiliation and, at this moment, Equiano turns to those he gauges as being *like* himself for knowledge and assurance. However, it is this absolute division that the entire *Interesting Narrative* is written against. Even at this moment, on the deck of a slave ship, however, the absolute break represented as a binary of opposition between African and European subjects cannot hold; difference remains between and among those constituted as African or black, even though they are produced as a unity in relation to the crew. This difference produces meaning at multiple levels of the narrative.

The yardstick that Equiano uses as a measure of likeness is recognized by him as being produced by the same body politics that operate to deny him his humanity. Held in tension, or creative friction, are both the potential of affiliation through a racialized body politics and a realization that in the relations of subjugation and exploitation that constitute the colonial encounter, the politics of the body simultaneously produces racialization as the technology or mechanism of differentiation *and* exceeds its boundaries. Equiano is well aware that those he turns to are *not* like him in every respect for when he wakes and sees 'black people' around him, among them are some he recognizes as 'those who brought me on board,' people who are not only responsible for his predicament but profit from his transformation into cargo. Those Africans that Equiano refers to as 'a *multitude* of black people of every description chained together', are not an undifferentiate unity but of 'every description'. Following his account of his induction into modernity as a

racialized subject, Equiano situates such racialization as the history of the present, a body politics which he immediately rejects. The multitude is presented as 'a set of singularities'; a social collectivity that cannot be reduced to sameness (Hardt & Negri 2004, p. 99, emphasis added).⁵

In this encounter Equiano is not only recognized by others and by himself as black he is also, and simultaneously, inducted into capitalist relations as cargo. His double inscription thrusts him into the violence and brutality which characterizes this forced scattering of peoples, the formation of the black diaspora. Are these the conditions of the entry into modernity? This dialectical creation of an identity marks a significant moment in the 'becoming' of modern racialized subjects. I would argue that Equiano's entire narrative is being written back to the moment of his own recognition of the meaning of his symbolic death as enslaved being, as property, as raced. *The Interesting Narrative* is being created out of what could be called a post-colonial consciousness/subjectivity, a consciousness which does not turn its back on or renounce the subject of the moment prior to the encounter with modernity, nor is the subject prior to the encounter dismissed as subject which is premodern and in need of modernization. Rather, Equiano re-inscribes, indeed re-invents, the subject as it exists prior to the encounter with Europeans, as the bearer of a valuable and valued perspective and knowledge for his contemporary readership. This narrative move is even more significant if these chapters are the political imaginings of an author of new world origin.

In these first chapters of his *Interesting Narrative* Equiano establishes for his readers the composite nature of his subject, a constantly shifting plurality of selves that prepare them for how they should read the rest of the narrative. The account of becoming a 'black' and abject subject, the history of the past, is superseded by the history of the present narration, the author writing not only as a 'free' person but as a 'black' and British citizen. As Wheeler characterizes it: 'Equiano's narrative continually spotlights this dilemma of the difference his skin color makes in the colonial world, and yet he maintains the similarity of his mind, feelings and aspirations to his readers (2000, p. 274). Equiano is, self-consciously, 'stepping into the recognitions that others give us' and manipulating these recognitions for his own purposes. While acknowledging that he exists within the limitations of the body politics of modernity, Equiano's constant urge to move beyond them is the ground of his intuition of a future cultural identity broader and more enlightened than the narrow and exclusionary national cultural identity of his English readership. If that readership would only step into the place of recognitions Equiano offers them, they could participate in a future in which the racialization of subjects has been transcended. Equiano speaks as a composite subject, a subject inhabiting multiple differences, as African, as black, as British, as Christian, as a diasporic and transnational citizen of the world, and in the process offers his readers the possibility of imagining a more complex cultural and national identity for

themselves. *The Interesting Narrative*, then, is powerful far beyond what has been acknowledged either in its political effect, as anti-slavery text, or with regard to what may be recognized in the future as the political work of a 'black American expatriate'. For Equiano, in 1789, offered the reading public an articulation of a way of being in the world that embodied an intuition, a possibility, of broadening and internationalizing what it could mean to be English and British. By taking a 'voyage of rediscovery', a 'return journey' ourselves to the fluid, multiple and complex modern subjectivities produced in the course of *The Interesting Narrative* we can reconsider the cultural identities we have inherited stepping into the recognition of our double inscription and its consequences with the hope of building ourselves anew.

If we follow the incisive analysis of Hall's essay, 'When was the Post-colonial?', we can locate examples of the narration into being of the racialized modern subject as a process of double inscription, narratives that attempt to transcend the binary oppositions of black/white, and/or colonizer and colonized in the creation of subjectivities that are mutually constitutive, coming into being in modernity simultaneously in relation to and through each other. But what do we make of these traditions?

Almost 200 years after the publication of *The Interesting Narrative*, in a post-colonial moment, Caribbean writer, George Lamming (1974) takes up Equiano's challenge to acknowledge the double inscription of the modern transatlantic racialized encounter. In the extraordinarily powerful novel, *Natives of My Person*, Lamming examines how the modern British national subject emerged out of the voyage to purchase, transport and sell enslaved humans. The process of becoming this type of modern subject is recorded by the commandant of the slave ship, *Reconnaissance*, in his diary:

Under my grave command, and by the loyal direction of my officers, Steward, Boatswain, Priest, and Surgeon, I had determined to cause this crew of former strangers to break free and loose from the ancient restrictions of the Kingdom of Lime Stone; and I declare it was my pride and no less to build from this battalion of vandals and honest men alike such an order as might be the pride and example of excellence to Lime Stone herself; that I would plant some portion of the Kingdom in a soil that is new and freely chosen, namely the Isles of the Black Rock, more recently known as San Cristobal. For I have seen men of the basest natures erect themselves into gentlemen of honour the moment they were given orders to seize command over the savage tribes of the Indies. Here is a perfect school in the arts of conquest and command.

(Lamming 1974, pp. 16–17)

Lime Stone is a thinly disguised reference to a Britain that is portrayed as a factionalized land of 'former strangers' who are wedded to 'ancient

restrictions,' strangers to each other but beings who find themselves belonging to a country that needs a colonial project to modernize and nationalize itself. Out of these 'raw materials' Lamming builds a 'voyage of rediscovery' through which to articulate the other side of the double inscription of the modern racialized encounter.

Natives of My Person narrates the emergence of Lime Stone as a modern nation through a voyage of enslavement and colonization. In a reversal of the narrative perspective of Equiano, Lamming allows his readers to access the consciousness of the *Reconnaissance* crew on the deck of the slave ship as their national subjectivity is formed in a mutual and simultaneous double inscription with the African as its property and source of future wealth. As the crew make the preparations for and receive their human cargo a national cultural identity and community gradually emerges from the encounter. During the transatlantic crossing the 'battalion of vandals and honest men alike' form, break and re-form alliances and allegiances making themselves modern men and freeing themselves from 'ancient restrictions' in order to become modern British national subjects who are liberated from the burden of their pastness. But this liberated subject is realized through, and utterly dependent upon, the creation of the unfree modern subject.

We are all familiar with Marlow's description of the 'city that always makes [him] think of "a whited sepulchre,"' in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The reference, of course, comes from the condemnation of the scribes and Pharisee's in Matthew (23:27-8): 'Woe unto you . . . for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness'. Marlow visits the Company in Brussels seeking employment in the colonies. In the waiting room he sees, 'a large, shining map, marked with all the colours of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red . . . a deuce lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and . . . a purple patch . . . However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the center' (Conrad 1999, p. 11).

The yellow, of course, marks Belgium's colonial possessions, the site of Marlow's future journey from Kinshasha to Stanley Falls. Far from being marginal or peripheral to Belgium then, Conrad situates the site of the colonial as being 'dead in the center,' not just of the wall but in the heart of the European city. *Heart of Darkness* is a modernist text which performs a double inscription of the colonial periphery into the metropole, a double inscription which transcends notions of center and margins, over here and over there, as separate histories with separate subjects.

In the face of Britain's contemporary amnesia about and nostalgia for its colonial past Pauline Melville, in her contemporary collection of short stories, *The Migration of Ghosts*, accomplishes a similar double inscription as she demonstrates that colonization and neo-colonialism is never external to the societies of the imperial metropolis but always deeply embedded within them.

In one of these stories, 'The President's Exile,' the ghost of a deposed president of an unnamed Caribbean nation, Baldwin Hercules, haunts the corridors, and rooms of the buildings in London in which he studied law, institutions into which he was subsequently welcomed as a president of a Commonwealth nation. A dictator who had his opponents tortured and assassinated, a president who constantly rigged his own re-election, Hercules is presented as a creature created by and granted his power within the walls of the London School of Economics, the Inns of Court, the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Colonial Office. The institutions in which we teach and work are, while apparently invested in producing free, independent thinking modern subjects are deeply implicated in the production, maintenance and reproduction of imperial power during and after colonialism. But they are wrapped in the architectural and ideological facades that hide the 'dead men's bones and uncleanness' of continued neo-colonial exploitation.

These examples imaginatively read colonization as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural global process, re-narrativizing it as a double-inscription, a breaking down of the inside/outside, here and there, them and us, home and abroad perspective (Hall 1996, pp. 246–247). This breaking down of these binaries, particularly those of home and abroad structure both Conrad's and Melville's narratives even though one is a modernist text and the other a product of late modern Britain. In Conrad's description of Marlow signing his contract Marlow describes the process as being 'let into a conspiracy.' The company's 'door of Darkness' in the heart of the metropolitan city of Brussels is the portal through which Marlow passes into the colony (Conrad 1999, p. 12).

Instances of reworking and rewriting the emergence of the racialized subject become even more complex when engaged with a feminist politics. Maryse Condé (1994) returns to the transatlantic terrain of Equiano and Lamming in an historical fiction to counter and rewrite the lack of voice of the enslaved female and to position her as product of same movement and diasporic becoming as the masculine subject which became the normative voice of the modern racialized subject. In contrast to Equiano's failure to imagine his sister as a complex, consciousness in his gradual journey toward modernity and beyond, Maryse Condé, initiates the passage of a black female subject of the seventeenth century into modernity in the three short and abrupt sentences that constitute the opening lines of her novel, *I, Tituba*:

Abena, my mother, was raped by an English sailor on the deck of *Christ the King* one day in the year 16** while the ship was sailing for Barbados. I was born from this act of aggression. From this act of hatred and contempt.

(Condé 1994, p. 3)

There is a quality of the routine and quotidian in the manner of the recitation of this rape, and in the unspecified year and the casual insertion of 'one day'. In *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano's unnamed sister is the repeating sign of his loss and abject status at the local level during the multiple stages of his passage into the diasporic estrangement of a global order. The loss of 'sister' also establishes the autonomous existence of the masculine subject; as merely a metaphor and sign Equiano's sister is fixed not only in the local but also irrevocably in the past.

In order to transcend the local particularities of the representation of the female in modern becomings Condé creates a modern female racialized subject who is conceived through an act of violence.

Questions of cultural identity in diasporas . . . have proved so troubling and perplexing for Caribbean people precisely because, with us, identity is irredeemably a historical question. Our societies are composed, not of one, but of many peoples. Their origins are not singular but diverse. Those to whom the land originally belonged have long since, largely perished – decimated by hard labour and disease. The land cannot be sacred because it was 'violated' – not empty but emptied. Everyone who is here originally belonged somewhere else. Far from being continuous with our pasts, our relation to that history is marked by the most horrendous, violent, abrupt, ruptural breaks. Ahead of the slowly evolving pact of civil association so central to the liberal discourse of Western modernity, our 'civil association' was inaugurated by an act of imperial will. What we now call the Caribbean was reborn in and through violence.

(Hall 2005, pp. 546–547)

The violent sexual violation of an African female captive in Condé's novel is, indeed, a horrendous act of imperial will but here the emergence of the Caribbean subject in modernity is given many particularities. Tituba is conceived in the transitional and transnational space of the forced transportation of African labor from the African continent to the new world but, for the female subject, being property and being labor take on the additional characteristics of being sexual property and being violently inducted into sexual labor. In addition to the bio-political economy of sexual transaction and transgression the conception of Condé's Caribbean protagonist is also carefully situated geographically. Tituba is a figure whose becoming is not only rooted in the violence of the encounter between Europe and Africa as the literal and metaphoric offspring of 'hatred and contempt', she is also a modern female racialized subject who emerges from and is located in the geo-politics of the encounter: Tituba is brought into being at the center of a triangulated Atlantic. In Condé's use of sexual subjugation, rape and sexual labor, as an originary

moment of the entry of the black female subject into modernity, she joins other black female intellectuals who have challenged dominant paradigms of the lone black male as the representative subject for understanding enslavement, oppression and the forced scattering of peoples.

But is the modern subject produced at the moment of consciousness of him or her self as modern, as a subject, as a modern subject, only when he or she governs the terms of her or his own narration and is this narration always, simultaneously, a re-narrativization of the relations of dominance and subordination inscribed in the encounter with colonial power or imperial will? In Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe*, the tool of back breaking labor of the title is transformed into a weapon by its black female protagonist, a weapon which she wields against those who have colonized and enslaved her body. This act of physical violence and rebellion, however, is not the subject matter of *The Polished Hoe*, what we assume to be a violent murder takes place before the novel opens. Rather, what is the concern of Austin's novel is an act of narrative and discursive violence and rebellion through which the modern subject emerges in its refusal to be bound by the terms and conventions of Western modernity. The protagonist denies, absolutely the terms and conditions of an enlightenment legal discourse, a discourse within which she is supposed to confine an account of her actions. The rejection of this discourse is a powerful act of narrative deconstruction and destruction both of which presage the creation of an alternative complex and multi-faceted narrative created by the subaltern herself. *The Polished Hoe* becomes a re-narrativization through which the black female produces herself as a modern subject who can contest the terms and conditions of knowledge, power and subordination which have produced her as merely a colonized body.

Part three

Nineteen forty-eight was . . . the year of the arrival at Tilbury Docks in the UK of the SS *Empire Windrush*, the troopship, with its cargo of West Indian volunteers, returning from home leave in the Caribbean, together with a small company of civilian migrants. This event signaled the start of post-war Caribbean migration to Britain and stands symbolically as the birthdate of the Afro-Caribbean black diaspora . . .

Migration has been a constant motif of the Caribbean story. But the *Windrush* initiated a new phase of diaspora formation whose legacy is the black Caribbean settlements in the UK . . . The fate of Caribbean people living in the US or Canada is no more 'external' to Caribbean history than the Empire was 'external' to the so-called domestic history of Britain, though that is indeed how contemporary historiography constructs them.

(Hall 2005, p. 543)

There is, it seems to me, an overwhelming tendency to abstract questions of race from what one might call their *internal* social and political basis and contexts in British society – that is to say, to deal with ‘race’ as if it has nothing intrinsically to do with the present ‘condition of England’. It’s viewed rather as an ‘external’ problem, which has been foisted to some extent on English society from the outside: it’s been visited on us, as it were, from the skies. To hear problems of race discussed in England today, you would sometimes believe that relations between British people and the peoples of the Caribbean or the Indian sub-continent began with the wave of black immigrants in the late forties and fifties . . .

[Neither right nor left] can nowadays bring themselves to refer to Britain’s imperial and colonial past, even as a contributory factor to the present situation. The slate has been wiped clean. Racism is not endemic to the British social formation. It has nothing intrinsically to do with the dynamic of British politics . . . It is not part of English culture . . . it does not belong to the ‘English ideology’.

(Hall 1978, pp. 23–24)

When I began my current project, *Child of Empire*, I intended that it would begin in 1948 when I was born into the bleak, scrupulously rationed world of post-World War II Britain, and became the daughter of a Welsh mother and a Jamaican father. *Child of Empire* was going to be the story of the post-war years in which I saw a new racial formation being established and new racialized British subjects coming into being. But the longer I have worked on it the further back I have pushed my narrative realizing that I should not ignore, or take for granted, the history out of and into which a subject emerges as a historical subject. For Hall’s insistence that ‘the fate of Caribbean people living in the US or Canada is no more “external” to Caribbean history than the Empire was “external” to the so-called domestic history of Britain’, has structural and conceptual consequences for how we shape our narratives, for how we write our histories of the emergence of Britain as a modern racialized state, and for how we tell our stories of becoming racialized subjects.

In the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II there has been a flurry of rediscoveries of the history of contemporary black Britain, a past which is being narrated as having its symbolic roots in the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* in 1948. This paradigm of migration has now become the dominant convention for understanding the racialization of subjects in modern Britain (see Chamberlain 1997; Francis 1998; Phillips & Phillips 1998).⁶ Each of these narrative inventions/re-inventions has created particular kinds of racialized subjects that constitute the modern, black British subject and community but they all tell the story of the emergence of a modern British ‘blackness’ which has its origins in post-war migration. I have decided to begin in a different moment, to tell a story that has its roots in a place that makes the

historical paradigm of the *Windrush* more complicated.⁷ I argue that it is not the *Windrush* alone which initiated a new phase of the formation of a Caribbean diaspora in the UK and ushered in a new racial state, but the presence of black civilian and military personnel during World War II.⁸

The mobilization of women in the homeland and of colonial troops and civilians in the Caribbean resulted in racialized encounters between young women from the colonial heartland and young men from its colonized periphery. The racialization of subjects during World War II occurred in the context of the expression of particular fears and anxieties which had developed about 'race' in the colonies and in British cities. These fears and anxieties circulated around these two sets of bodies: the racialization of black men was articulated in relation to white women and the subjecthood of white females was, in turn, articulated in relation to the former. Many of these encounters flourished into sexual relationships and, despite overwhelming opposition from friends, family, strangers and society at large, some culminated in marriage and increased the number of what officials regarded as the 'problem' of 'half-caste children'. I see, then, an alternative genealogy for post-war settlement, a genealogy that grows out of the struggles over English/British national and cultural identity during the war. There is much at stake in the sort of narrative decisions we make. I do not intend to write 'a mere romantic recreation of the past, not a looking backward in nostalgia.' For I agree with Hall that 'the problem of living and writing more fully now is related to the full, critical experience we have of the past' (Hall 1958, p. 14).

The many roles that Caribbean men and women played in World War II have not been documented in comprehensive histories of the period (Spencer 1995, p. 212). Of those based in the UK there were approximately twelve and a half thousand volunteers in the armed services, the vast majority from Jamaica and serving in the Royal Air Force (RAF). Of the civilians recruited by the Ministry of Labor there were a thousand technicians and trainees working in Merseyside and Lancashire munitions factories and twelve hundred British Hondurans working as foresters in Scotland (Sherwood 1985; Spencer 1995, p. 212).

Beginning in 1942 upwards of three million American troops began to arrive, 130,000 of which were black (Reynolds 1996; Smith 1987). British politicians were alarmed at the possible consequences of the presence of black colonial and US personnel on British soil. In the reactions of these politicians to these black bodies and in the policies that were instituted to control and discipline them we can trace the emergence of the UK as a modern racialized state, as modern racial formation, years before the *Windrush* docks. Most accounts of American troops stationed in Britain during the war and of Britain's wartime relations with its colonies are written as separate and discrete histories. However, the response of British politicians to the presence in Britain of black troops and civilians, from the US and the colonies, was

influenced by an inter-related and interdependent series of ideological and political beliefs: by ideas of race that circulated throughout and about the British Empire; by actual and imaginative relations to Britain's colonial subjects; and by a desire to appease Britain's most powerful ally, the US.

My own introduction to British history began in the 1950s, in my elementary school, when my whole class was asked to describe the contribution of our fathers to the war effort. When it was my turn I stood and said that my father was in the RAF. At home we had a photograph of my dad in his uniform, RAF cap at the correct jaunty angle, wearing an airforce moustache and holding a pipe in his hand, the epitome of heroic British manhood, I thought. The teacher interrupted me before I could describe the photograph to my classmates telling me, abruptly, to sit down and listen carefully to what she had to say. First, I was issued a very stern warning about the dire consequences of lying, then I was assured that there were no 'colored' people in Britain during the war, or serving in its armed services, leave alone in the RAF, the *crème de la crème* of the military. Finally, our teacher addressed us all, 'colored' people, we must remember, were not British but came as immigrants arriving after the war was over. I guessed that this meant that I was not British either because I had absorbed a previous lesson that I was 'colored'. In spite of the fact that the wartime activities of black peoples in Britain was quickly and effectively erased from cultural memory, I would argue that reactions to their presence were significant factors in the formation of modern, British/English national culture.

I am always amused by the accounts of the American servicemen who characterized their British hosts as the opposite of how they would define a modern people. One early American volunteer for the RAF liked English people but also viewed them in a fashion similar to that of George Lamming's character, the Commandant, as being tied to 'ancient restrictions'. He described his frustration at what he saw as the inertia produced by Britain's 'Old School Tie' class consciousness, a society governed by the forces of 'tradition and precedent,' forces which he found so strong that, in his words, 'thinking in politics, business and religion seems to have congealed'. He viewed the British as 'the most economically backward people' he had met,' a people who heartily resisted 'labor-saving devices and short-cut direct business methods' (Reynolds 1996, p. xxv). Others describe the presence in Britain of up to three million American service personnel as the cause of a 'social revolution'. If, in some ways, Britain resisted the modern world as represented by America it conceded to the US's dominant discourse through which racialized subjects were produced as the absolute other. The policies and practices of the British Government during the war manufactured racialized subjects in accord with segregated relations of subjugation.

The recruitment of civilian workers from the Caribbean into Britain began in February 1941 and they were sent to areas of previous black settlement in

the North West because that is where officials thought they would be ‘most easily *absorbed*’ (Sherwood 1985, p. 58). These schemes for industrial workers were deliberately designed to prevent any further black settlement and were linked to programs for post-war colonial development: limited terms of employment followed by immediate repatriation. Some bright sparks in the Colonial Office even imagined that segments of the already settled black population in British ports could be removed when the war ended: “‘the great coloured social problem’” in Liverpool and other port towns would be “‘greatly eased by the resettlement of African peoples in West Africa where they could obtain proper and adequate employment’” (Rich 1990, p. 162). As early as January 1942 there was official dismay at the prospect of black servicemen being based in Britain. The Foreign Office consulted with other departments and then issued a memo expressing anxiety about the possible consequences: ‘the recruitment to the United Kingdom of Colored British subjects, whose remaining in the United Kingdom after the war might create a social problem, was not considered desirable’ (Reynolds 1996, p. 217).

Although the British government was already worried about its home-grown black residents and the increasing presence of black colonial subjects, histories of the response to the presence of black American soldiers in Britain have been written as though an American ‘racial problem’ was imported into the UK with US troops and that the UK had no experience of how to deal with it (Reynolds 1996; Smith 1987). Winston Churchill had been urging President Roosevelt to send American troops to Britain since the Autumn of 1941 but when Roosevelt announce to Congress on January 6, 1942 that US forces were to be stationed in the UK the British government did all it could to dissuade the Americans from sending black GIs (Smith 1987, pp. 37–38, 50–51) and the British Chiefs of Staff asked for the maximum number of *white* engineering regiments (Reynolds 1996, p. 217) Throughout that spring and summer, British officials pressure the government of the US to ‘reduce as far as possible the number of colored troops...sent to this country’. In what has to be considered a pathetic attempt to represent this exclusionary British policy as altruistic, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden told American Ambassador Winant that, ‘our climate was badly suited to negroes’ (Reynolds 1996, p. 217).

But black GIs arrived and kept on arriving. The US military command insisted that they were needed to service and supply their European Theatre of Operations (ETO); the occupants of Whitehall, along with ETO, resolved that these black troops would have to be managed, and being managed meant segregating them. On a visit to Britain, Arthur Sulzberger, the publisher of *The New York Times*, actually recognized that Britain already had a resident black population when he made what he thought was ‘a gesture of sympathy’ for Whitehall’s dilemma, and suggested that black American troops ‘be moved out of rural areas and concentrated in ports like Liverpool’ because it was in places

like these, that the British were 'used to all kinds of foreigners, including negroes' (Reynolds 1996, p. 218; Smith 1987, pp. 190–191).

What evolved were government, military, national and local practices that produced racialized subjects as external to ideologies of what constituted acceptable conventions of British/English subjecthood and citizenship. These practices were intended to police very specific kinds of encounters, sexual encounters between black men and white women: 'Politicians reasoned . . . that if sexual contacts with indigenous women were to cause the least anxiety, methods of controlling them would have to be found' (Smith 1987, p. 190). Particular meanings adhered to these black male and white female bodies and to the geo-politics of their encounters, to the spatial relation they inhabited on the cultural terrain of British society.

Commanders in the US military were worried about the antagonism that would arise between their black and white troops if the black troops were seen with white women. General Eisenhower suggested that a rotation of leave passes, which would guarantee that white and colored troops were never in the same town on the same day, would solve the 'problem' (Reynolds 1996, p. 220). And, indeed, the British government decided that managing the issue meant instituting practices of racial segregation. The War Office and the Home Office were more than happy to oblige their white American 'cousins', black Americans have never been embraced by this familial term, because racial segregation relieved their own fears and anxieties about the consequences of sexual relations between white and black. The Colonial Office, did not want the British role in instituting American style racial segregation to be revealed to the general public because of a concern that such revelations would cause anger and frustration in British colonies (Rich 1990, pp. 150–153).⁹

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) complained to the A[merican] R[ed] C[ross] on several occasions about 'segregated recreational centers in London and other English cities for Negro soldiers' and its executive secretary, Walter White, cabled Churchill in November about reports that the British government had asked Washington to send no more black troops to Britain. (After long consultation the Foreign Office decided discretely to ignore the telegram because it was doubted 'whether we could honestly give a categorical denial'.)

(Reynolds 1996, pp. 218–219; see also Smith 1987, pp. 52–53)

However, it would have been difficult for the British government to institute segregation without the cooperation of its regional Commissioners, many of whom were ex-colonial officials, and without the participation of local police forces and local government officials.

Covert racial segregation became the practice in the West Country from July 1942. (Smith 1987, pp. 54–55) In Somerset, the county in which my mother grew up and not far from where I, eventually, would be born:

Wherever possible a new black unit in SOS [Services of Supply] was ‘quarantined’ on base to allow time to ‘indoctrinate’ it about British conditions and to coordinate arrangements with local officials . . . liaison officers working with British Southern Command made arrangements in towns like Yeovil and Chard for separate blocks of cinema seats or separate rooms in pubs for black troops. The aim . . . was to prevent ‘white and colored soldiers from attending the same activities simultaneously,’ while giving each race ‘an equal opportunity of attending the same [kind of] functions as the other.’ But, to avoid imputations of racial discrimination, everything was to be done ‘on an organizational basis’ – in other words, a dance would be held for a company of the ‘98th Engineer Regiment’ (which happened to be black) or for a company of the 16th Infantry Regiment (which happened to be white). As [Gen. J.C.H.] Lee himself put it: ‘While color lines are not to be announced or even mentioned, entertainments such as dances should be “by organization.” The reason, if any, given for such an arrangement should be “limitation of space and personnel”’.

(Reynolds 1996, p. 222)

My mother worked in the Air Ministry, a government department which had been moved out of London to Worcester but she says she did not realize, until I told her, that black and white American troops were segregated in the area where she lived and worked. For soldiers stationed in the general depot at Aschurch three miles outside of Tewkesbury – white troops had passes Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, black troops Monday, Wednesday and Friday and white and black alternated Sundays. A day club was established for black troops at Tewkesbury and clubs at Worcester and Cheltenham for white troops (Reynolds 1996, pp. 222–223). But the warning from the Colonial Office was heeded, practices of racialization were always denied, instead it was ‘organizational’ justifications that were provided for the existence of such segregation. While officially ‘the British government distanced itself from’ the US Army’s practices of racial segregation, the US Army could not have instituted and maintained racial segregation ‘without cooperation or at least acquiescence from British authorities’ (Reynolds 1996, pp. 223–224).

Nor were the leaders of the British Armed forces opposed to segregation. It was agreed at the War Office that ‘British officers should lecture their troops, including women soldiers of the Auxillary Territorial Service (ATS), on the need to minimise contact with black GIs’. Despite the fact that at the War Office they ‘were reluctant to put anything on paper, because of the

delicacy of the subject', 'General Arthur Dowler, the senior administrative officer in Southern Command, went ahead and issued his "Notes on Relations with Colored Troops"', on August 7, 1942. In this document Dowler stated that the "generality" of blacks "were of simple mental outlook" and lacked "the white man's ability to think and act to a plan" . . . British soldiers,' he continued 'should not make intimate friends with them, taking them to cinemas and bars,' 'white women should not associate with colored men' at all: they 'should not walk out, dance or drink with them.' Dowler wanted 'the British, both men and women, to realize the problem and adjust their attitude so that it conforms to that of the white American citizen.' There was no objection, not even from the Colonial Office 'to the double standard policy of covertly supporting US Army segregation as long as the British authorities were not implicated in its enforcement' (Reynolds 1996, pp. 224–335). Nancy Cunard and George Padmore, wrote a pamphlet, *The White Man's Duty* (1942), to publicize how 'the coloured soldier of the USA over here in very large numbers records . . . may be the same as a white American soldier in democracy, when democracy is a battlefield, [but] he is not the same in daily relations with the people of Great Britain, because some of his chiefs have requested that this be not so.' And as Cunard and Padmore went on to stress, 'the colour issue in Britain was part of the wider question of racial discrimination within the empire as a whole' (quoted in Rich 1990, pp. 154–155).¹⁰

The anxieties and fears, the frantic exchange of covert memos and circulation of not so covert 'Notes', the endless wrangling and maneuvering among the Ministries, the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office about the spatial management and control of white and black bodies, the 'what on earth to do' nature of it all, swirl and coalesce around the figures in this photograph, my parents (figure 1). The mechanisms of racialization policed and attempted to prevent what they are doing, what they might have done and what they might be thinking of doing in a 'capillary functioning of power' (Foucault 1995, p. 198). These bodies were the fulcrum, 'the point where power reaches into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (Foucault 1980, p. 39). Cabinet discussions drew upon racist ideologies articulated in relation to the past and present of subject peoples in the colonies and black settlements in Britain in order to predict what it would face in the future. The Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, stated that he was: 'fully conscious that a difficult sex problem might be created . . . if there were a substantial number of cases of sex relations between white women and coloured troops and the procreation of half-caste children' (Rich 1990, p. 152).

Morrison's articulation of what he called a 'sex problem' did not arise from the recognition of 'an "external" problem', which had been 'foisted to some extent on English society from the outside' (Hall 1978, p. 23), or



FIGURE 1 Photograph of author's parents circa 1945.

imported into Britain with the arrival of the bodies of black GI's. On the contrary, it was 'home grown' composite racialized consciousness, drawing upon official responses in the past to the existence of black communities in Britain and racialized bodies in colonial territories, a consciousness that gave English national culture its character, meaning, substance and resonance. Before the war this consciousness had been nurtured, given form and realized in the policing and disciplining of colonial subjects and black residents of Bristol, Cardiff, London and Liverpool (Fletcher 1930, Tabili 1994, Brown 2005).

West Indians who served in the RAF during the war have recently begun to tell their own stories of their humiliation. They have recounted memories of British women groping their rectums in order locate their tails, tails that they imagined West Indian men hid in their trousers and of children running from them in fear (Murray 1996, p. 101–103). They tell stories about the Paramount dance hall on Tottenham Court Road and the brutality they suffered at the hands of those British and American white men who resented West Indians dancing with English women. Antagonism to this 'intimate socializing' was also expressed in the newspapers who had a 'field day talking about "ill-timed and unwanted fraternizing" and that blacks and whites should never be allowed to mix in such a way.' One West Indian remembers reading

an article entitled 'Don't Let this Go On' which suggested that the Paramount should be bombed. It was 'a concerted attempt' he concluded 'to besmirch the name of the Paramount who dared to permit black servicemen to pass through its doors' (Murray 1996, pp. 110–112).

Another Jamaican ex-serviceman tells the story of being refused service in a pub after a game of cricket and says that in the more than 50 years since, he has never forgotten how he felt:

I had to take myself, my little case containing my cricket kit, my unquenched thirst and walk slowly home . . . I was taking stock of myself and, for the first time in my life, I was asking myself: Why have I travelled thousands of miles to be on the receiving end of such treatment? I was as British, nay I considered myself more British than the British . . . and more patriotic than the most fanatic Anglophile.

He walked back to his base in floods of tears, he told his interviewer, remembering how Jamaica had presented the UK with a squadron of Spitfires at the beginning of the war (Murray 1996, pp. 160–161).

My father wrote to me to describe his arrival in the UK as a Jamaican airman recently flown in from training in Canada. When he and the other Jamaican volunteers arrived in RAF Padgate, Bridgenorth early in 1943, before they were even taken to their billets the sergeant receiving them 'took us the ablutions where we received instructions in meticulous detail on how to use the shower, the wash basins and the toilets, as if to say we had never seen or used a bathroom before.'

It was not only black subjects that were policed and disciplined. Black servicemen were dialogically constituted in their blackness in and through their potential and actual encounters with white women who were also to be 'managed'. Reynolds records the 'intensive efforts [that] were made to guide the conduct of British women'. For women who were in the armed service 'military discipline was invoked' to discourage them from fraternizing with black soldiers and by January 1944 these policies hardened when 'the Women's Territorial Auxillary issued an order "forbidding its members to speak to colored American soldiers except in the presence of a white [person]"'. These systems of surveillance were not only instituted and regulated by the military they were also enabled and maintained by members of local constabularies who 'routinely reported women soldiers found in the company of black GIs to their superiors.' Even civilian women were prosecuted by their local police who evoked 'a variety of laws' to take them into custody when they were found 'in company of black soldiers' (Reynolds 1996, p. 229).

White women were counseled by families, friends and authorities alike, against marriage with black men; black American soldiers who wished to

marry British women were refused permission to do so by their Commanding Officers and quickly transferred. Black journalist Ormus Davenport, 'himself a wartime GI, claimed that there had been a "gentleman's agreement" to prevent mixed marriages'. But 'in the 8th Air Force Service Command where most of the American Air Force blacks were concentrated, a total ban on such marriages was quite explicit' (Reynolds 1996, p. 231). The result was disastrous for their offspring.

If 'loose lips sank ships,' women with 'loose' morals were regarded as a direct threat to the health and safety of the nation. White women who became the escorts of/or married black servicemen were placed beyond the pale of acceptable behavior. One Jamaican ex-serviceman recalls:

Women who befriended the Westindian servicemen were a much maligned body of people, being objects of derision, jibes and taunts. Yet most never wavered in the allegiance and loyalty when the going was toughest and no amount of praise could be too high for them. In the very early days they remained a tower of strength and were among the few to extend a hand of welcome to the lads.

(Murray 1996, p. 111)

Sonya Rose has provided us with a comprehensive account of the moral panic 'about the declining morals of girls and young women in British cities and towns' during World War II (Rose 1998, p. 1147). She argues that definitions of the nation during World War II 'could not incorporate within it pleasure-seeking, fun-loving, and sexually expressive women and girls. The women and girls who could not or would not put aside their "foolish world" to rescue the nation were constructed as anti-citizens – in contrast to those who were self-sacrificing'. Women who crossed the boundaries of conventional behavior, particularly in war-time, were labeled 'good-time girls' and became associated within official discourses with venereal disease, thus becoming a threat to the health of the nation (Rose 1998, p. 1164). But women who openly expressed their sexual selves and sexual desires in encounters with black servicemen were particularly vilified and seen as a particular threat to the nation's future.

Graham Smith discovered, in the records of the Colonial Office, minutes from a Bolero Committee meeting about Black GI's in August of 1942 in which someone wondered 'whether "an open statement on the danger of venereal disease" would deter British women from associating with the blacks' and someone else suggested initiating a 'whispering campaign' along those lines. Despite objections from others in attendance at the meeting, Smith thinks it 'likely that a programme of rumour-spreading' about black GIs and venereal disease 'was started' and that it was facilitated through the vehicles of the Women's Voluntary Service, and, possibly, the BBC (Smith 1987, p. 195). In this manner, both black male bodies and white female bodies were

designated vectors of disease, carriers of a threat which could literally and metaphorically infect the nation. But the greatest fear was reserved for the future of the nation. If white women became the bearers of half-caste children a post-war era of peace and stability, for which so many hoped, would be irrevocably disrupted.

Whereas George Lamming in *Natives of My Person* (1974) represented the formation of the modern European national subject, a subject liberated from the burden of its pastness, as being realized through and dependent upon, its enslavement of others, during World War II the British made themselves modern and began the process of liberating themselves from their ancient restrictions, from the pastness that was the colonization of others, through new processes of racialization and racist practices in their encounter with black people on their own soil. These encounters between a parochial British population and both black Americans and black volunteers from the Caribbean prefigured the formation of post-war black British subjects.

I used to imagine that being born a brown baby in a tiny village outside of Okehampton in the county of Devon, in January 1948, was being born into a homogeneously white social and cultural landscape but only three years before thousands of US black troops had been based in Devon and the adjacent county of Somerset. Not far from where I was born, 20 brown British babies were wards of Somerset County Council and the British Home Office. They were housed in Holnicote House which the Somerset Council ran as an orphanage.¹¹ *Life Magazine* (1948) published seven of the children's photographs under the headline 'The Babies They Left Behind Them' (figure 2). The article which accompanies the photograph describes the children as the offspring of US black soldiers and English women: 'Their fathers have returned to the U.S.. Their mothers have given them up, in most cases reluctantly, because of ostracism by village neighbours.' These children were not imagined as present and future citizens but as 'problems' that should be exported. The British government, the article states 'are now considering offers of adoption received from US negro families' (*Life Magazine* 1948, p. 41) The double inscription of racialized encounters in modernity was resolved, not only in the dialectics of the encounter between black and white, but through the rejection of the transgressive bodies of their offspring, the 'absolute pathology which underwrote the half-caste category justifying the subordinate positions of Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, the white women married to them, and their children within society' (Brown 2005, p. 196).

Recently, I have been writing about the visual representation of brown bodies and thinking about visual narratives of spectacle and cultural memory. I am particularly interested in the complex narratives of gendering, racialization, sexual and class affiliations at work in the representation of British racialized subjects in the 1940s and 1950s. *Picture Post* is a particularly rich source of these images because within its pages is enacted a claim to its being considered a



FIGURE 2 'The Babies they Left Behind Them' *Life Magazine*, August 1948. Reproduced with permission Getty Images.

global magazine, not in so far as it represented or attracted a global readership, but in so far as it functioned as a mechanism which translated the global into the local site of Britishness/Englishness. In a dialectical process of translation Britishness/Englishness is both imagined and produced as a belonging that existed in multiple dimensions, local and global. In the immediate post-war years when it is clear that the US has emerged as the dominant political and economic force in the world, there is deep anxiety about empire, about what constitutes Britishness/Englishness within the terms of empire, about what values it does or could or should embody. It is in the production of definitions of Britishness/Englishness that *Picture Post* reveals the cracks, fissures and contradictions in modern British subjecthood.

It is within this context of a crisis and anxiety about national subjecthood that images of Britain's post-war 'colored' citizens appear (figures 3 and 4).

Black citizens were represented as being as external to the history of the nation. *Picture Post* articulated a national voice, a sense of national belonging when visualized who were not to be included. Black Britons were citizens who were located within discourses of outsidership, colonialism, subject peoples, empire and migration, but never within discourses of belonging. With the juxtaposition of these two images, a family photograph and a photograph from *Picture Post* two different narratives appear.

In the first I am two years old, a black British subject standing in the back garden of our house in Streatham in South London. There is nothing unusual about this photograph, in fact it is in many ways a typical family photograph in



FIGURE 3 Author 2 years old.

a typical British back yard, small, with a fence, flowers, weeds and a path. My dress is hand-made with smocking and gathered sleeves, typical of 1950, the socks and shoes are clean and bright. I was obviously dressed for the camera not for play and clearly located in a time and a place. On the right is *Picture Post*'s 1948 image of "The Lonely Picanniny," with the caption "so small and defenceless, so waiting to be comforted."

What is so interesting about the *Picture Post* image is that this young child is located precisely nowhere – the blank white space emphasizes a total lack of affiliation and erases from imagination any possibility of belonging (Blumenfeld 1948). Erwin Blumenfeld, the photographer, delighted in contrivance according to the art critic Vicki Goldberg. His 'photographic setups were composed with infinite care . . . In the arrangements and then again in the darkroom, he went to such lengths that it can be almost impossible to tell how the picture was made, and the contrivance occasionally overshadows the subject' (Goldberg 1999). Looking at 'The Lonely Picanniny' I am prompted to ask: what was the contrivance that caused the child such misery? Was the photograph taken against a blank studio wall, or was it taken in a location (that related to the misery) a location that was subsequently erased. Was the misery caused by the photographer?



FIGURE 4 *Picture Post* April 3, 1948. Reproduced with Permission British Library.

Whatever the conditions of its production we must also consider the historical conditions at work in the production of meaning that the editors of *Picture Post* imagined it would have in their reproduction of the photograph in the context of Britain in April 1948. The pain, the way the figure is totally turned in on herself and total lack of external referents situates this figure as completely isolated and dislocated, coming from nowhere, belonging nowhere, except perhaps within the discourse of empire as a ‘defenceless’ subject awaiting an act of British magnanimity. Frozen in time and completely dislocated spatially, this black child has no past, present or future: its condition is alien – outside of the temporality, and place of the nation. Of course a ‘picanniny’ would be miserable, and alone, the figure was by definition, an aberration in the racial politics of the time. But, in the very absence of a sign or referent that could place this figure as belonging to the nation, a discourse of who is actually included in the national community is being produced in the form of a ‘highly exclusive and exclusivist [English] cultural identity’. A British subject is what this ‘picanniny’ is not but through this act of negation is brought into activity a bio-politics which not only define belonging and citizenship in post-war Britain but constitute a refusal ‘to produce ourselves anew’.

Notes

- 1 This emerging racial state provides the context for my current work in progress, *Child of Empire*.
- 2 All references will be to the Norton edition edited by Werner Sollers.
- 3 Caretta points out that in Equiano's first years of life he is in a non-literate society and it is these years of life that are in doubt. Once he is in a literate society, and by that Caretta means a society with institutions that keep written records, like that of the Royal Navy, *The Interesting Narrative*, he declares, is 'remarkably consistent with the historical record' (2005, p. xvi).
- 4 See the very rich and interesting account of the complex, contradictory and multiple nature of Equiano's affiliations in relation to his own slave trading and political involvement in the scheme to export the poverty stricken black residents of London to Sierra Leone in Srinivas Aravamudan (1999, pp. 233–288).
- 5 'The multitude is composed of a set of singularities – and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different.'
- 6 These are some of the most obvious choices but there are many, many more, among them: Webster (1998), Owusu (2000), Procter (2000) and Alibhai-Brown (2001). See also the BBC2 television production *Windrush*.
- 7 *Child of Empire* returns to the inter-war years in order to juxtapose the stories of growing up in the colonial periphery and the imperial heartland, a story I will not go into here.
- 8 Laura Tabili argues that: 'In the 1920s and 1930s racial categories and racial subordination were reconstituted on British soil.'
- 9 See also the reproduction of documents containing these discussions in Hachey (1974).
- 10 This is one of the few sources I have found to discuss how attitudes toward 'race' during the war are shaped both in relation to the Americans and Britain's colonial policy. When Viscount Cranborne, for the Colonial Office opposed the dissemination of the War Office's 'Notes on Relations with Coloured Troops' and resisted attempts 'to bend to American pressure' Rich argues that 'Policy on racial discrimination and the preservation of British colonial policy . . . were . . . for Cranbourne, crucially linked, and for the first time in British government policy there was exhibited a far-reaching understanding of the inter-relationship between race and wider public policy in both Britain and the colonial empire' (1990, pp. 151, 153).
- 11 This long and complex story forms a substantial section of my current work-in-progress, *Child of Empire*.

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