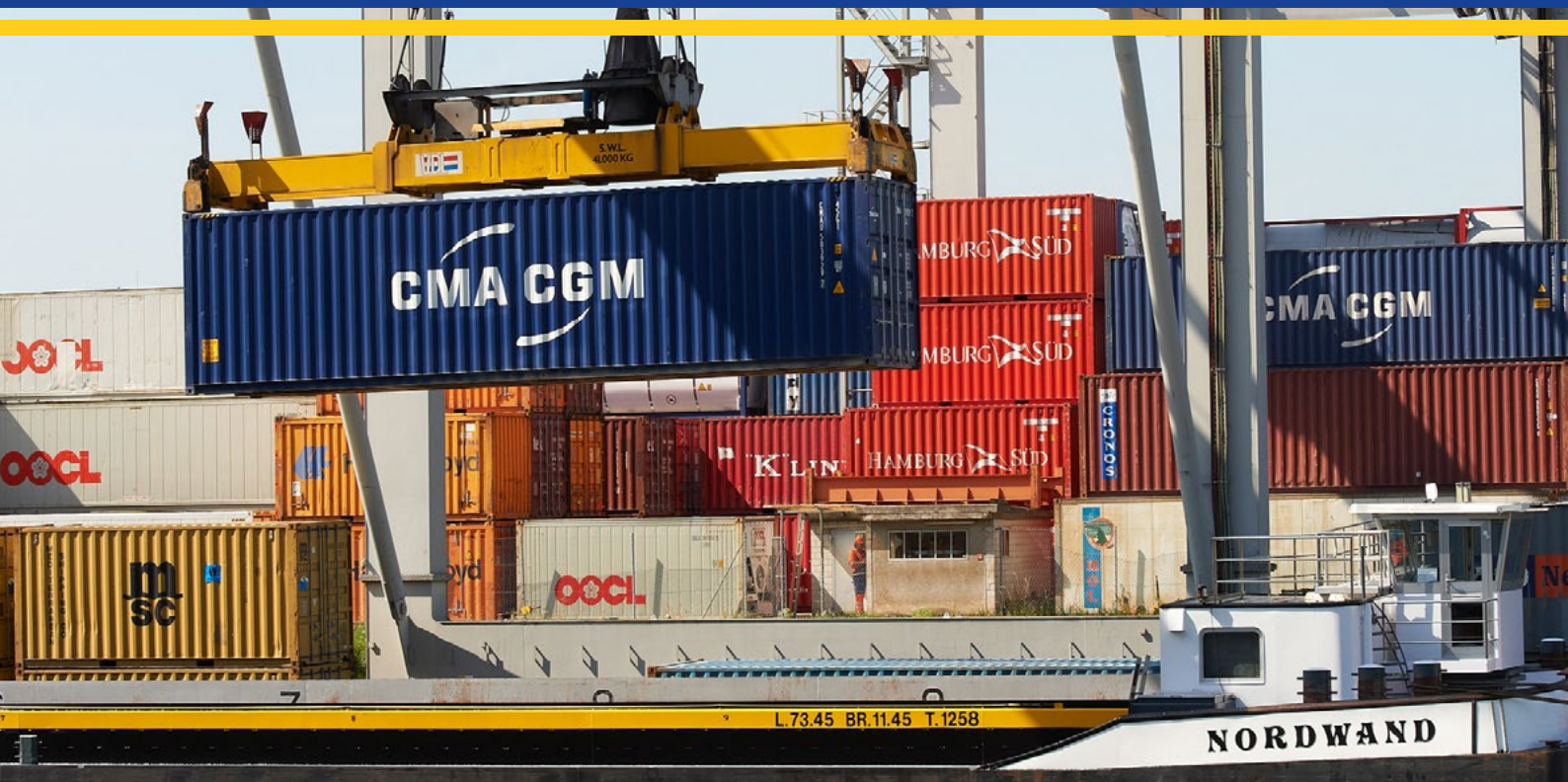


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No. 108

**BLACK CITY AND WHITE COUNTRY.
IMMIGRATION AND IDENTITY IN THE HISTORY OF
BRITISH DECOLONIZATION**

Benedikt Stuchtey

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ABSTRACT

This essay looks at the question of integrative and disintegrative elements of imperial rule in multiethnic societies and tries to identify lines of continuity between the imperial past and post-imperial realities. What influence did immigration have on the construction of self-image in Britain after the Second World War, and what historical continuities existed, particularly with respect to ethnic policies?

Clearly, imperialism deeply unsettled British society, as did the empire unsettle the former colonial world. It is also at this point where the tension between the concepts of Empire, Britishness, and Englishness enter the debate.

KEY WORDS

decolonization, Englishness, immigration, liberty, racism

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Johnnie and Barbara were just ordinary people. “Johnnie came from Lagos, West Africa, seven years ago. He had been a steward on a passenger boat. She was born in Finchley [...]. He has worked for the Post Office, on the railways, and at the docks. She dips chocolates at a factory. They had been courting for about a year before they got married. Now they live in a dark basement room on the edge of Camden Town, where the blackened plaster is peeling from the house fronts, and the trains rumble by into St. Pancras Station. ‘Yes’, says Barbara, ‘there were objections alright [sic.]. Remember Auntie Mary, Johnnie – who had only seen your photograph? Oh, it’s alright [sic.]for you, Babs, they said, you’re big. What about the children? Remember they’ll only be little.’ [...]” But Barbara was convinced her love would be strong enough to protect her children from insults. And her landlords saw problems. “He wouldn’t mind for himself, he said, but the other tenants would complain. They were all middle class people.” [...] “Yes, it is hard for Jonnie [sic.] to find work. ‘Firms [he said] won’t take on a Negro, when there is an Englishman who could do the job.’ [...] Sometimes, waiters and barmen will just keep him standing there waiting to be served, until he goes away.”²

1. Introduction

What the *Picture Post* described in its issue of late October 1954 seemed to be not an exception but the rule in everyday Britain of the mid-fifties, where about 100,000 ‘colored’ people were already living, thousands of them married to whites. What was the price in insults and hardships, the paper asked, and what did relatives and neighbours think about their relationships? Certainly, if compared to South Africa, there was no law in Britain by which couples in mixed marriages could be put into prison.³ In South Africa, a Population Registration Act of 1950 had allocated everybody as belonging to ‘racial groups’, and an ‘Immorality Act’ made extramarital intercourse across racial boundaries a criminal offence. The battle mixed marriages faced in Britain was not one against reason or state power, but against prejudice, ignorance, and fear. “Here,” the newspaper argued, “a man marries the woman he wants, and there’s nothing to stop him. Nothing. Nothing, except the knowledge that seven British men out of ten feel their insides shrinking at the very thought of a coloured man fathering the children of a white girl.”⁴ Thus the original text from a newspaper with a wide circulation. The race question, in short, was as present as ever. What implications did it have, given that Britain was a country in the process of decolonizing its

² Trevor Philpott: ‘Would You Let Your Daughter Marry a Negro?’, in: *Hulton’s National Weekly, Picture Post*, Special Issue: All About Marriage (30 October 1954), 21-23, here at 22.

³ T. R. H. Davenport: *South Africa. A Modern History*. Toronto/Buffalo 1991, 328.

⁴ Trevor Philpott (1954): ‘Would You Let Your Daughter Marry a Negro?’, here at 21.

empire? What did it mean for the relationship between Britain and the Commonwealth countries? Marking the end of the long history of colonial expansion, from the mid to late 1950s, Britain experienced for the first time the effects of its contraction. The social history of the period was strongly influenced by a range of anxieties that challenged the version of Old England and the historical grandeur of the project of nation and Empire.⁵ In many ways, Britain was now socially 'frozen' in so far as most people retreated to familiar ways, familiar rituals, and material interests, slowly lifting post-war austerity. With consumerism gaining social reputation, particularly among the working classes, class divisions continued while the welfare state remained unreformed. For this project, neither imperialism nor decolonization were external factors of the nation-state – instead, they were internally constitutive.

Following on from this, this essay looks at the crucial years of post-war British history when illiberalism, most notably towards black immigrants, prevailed and when society and family life were constructed according to realities as opposed to political assumptions and social aspirations. In evaluating this certainly very important chapter in Britain's past, one needs to ask how big the moral issue of the Empire was for those who benefited from it or endured its existence. The 1950s were like a watershed in this sense, from Cyprus and Malaya to Kenya (Mau Mau) and Ghana's independence in 1956. These events all contributed to the growing sense of national decline, resulting in the Suez crisis of 1957, and to the racism with which immigrants were confronted who first mainly came from the Caribbean, and later on from South Asia.

First, some general observations on the comparison of empires will be presented in order to see the British case in its European context; then, questions concerning the relationship between empire, liberty, and race will be asked, before the connections between immigration and identity are addressed. To arrive at a fair assessment of the accounts of European imperialism is not easy, as has also been confirmed by British politicians. Former prime minister Tony Blair was prepared to express "deep sorrow" for British wrongdoings two centuries after the abolition of the slave trade.⁶ On the other hand, Gordon Brown asserted that – in his words – "the days of Britain having to apologize for its colonial history are over".⁷

5 David Kynaston: *Family Britain, 1951-1957*. London 2009, esp. 447-452.

6 Colin Brown: Blair Admits to "Deep Sorrow" over Slavery – but No Apology, in: *The Independent* (2006), URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/blair-admits-to-deep-sorrow-over-slavery-but-no-apology-426058.html> (18 January 2015).

7 Benedict Brogan: It's Time to Celebrate the Empire, Says Brown, in: *Daily Mail* (2005), URL: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-334208/Its-time-celebrate-Empire-says-Brown.html> (18 January 2015).

2. General Observations on the Comparison of Empires

Empires generate their own legacies. The dissolution of Europe's continental empires at the end of the First World War, the British and French re-orientation regarding their maritime empires, and finally the process of decolonization after 1945 did not simply mark the end of imperial experiences. The many successor states which emerged from Tsarist Russia, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire as well as post-colonial societies were confronted with a great number of social legacies and cultural inheritance from their respective pasts. In addition there was a strong element of continuity with regard to the administrative, military, and economic elites, which influenced the transition from empires to a post-imperial world.⁸ Whether distancing themselves from the past or searching for new models of legitimacy, post-imperial states and societies were constantly accompanied and challenged by their different historical experiences which continued to have a major influence on metropolitan societies.⁹ This becomes particularly obvious in immigration from the former colonies, whether in France, Britain or the Netherlands, with its massive social and political implications since the late 1950s. It is here that one of the Britain's colonial questions needs to be asked.

Ever since we have been allowed to indulge in imperial nostalgia again following Niall Ferguson's apologetic account of a humane and beneficial British Empire,¹⁰ it has been easier to be proud of it and to denounce the voices of its critics. The age of decolonization has played a particular role in this matter to the extent that the process of decolonization seemed to prove the superiority of the British imperial system over other European imperialisms such as the French, Portuguese, Dutch, Russian, German, and Belgian ones, let alone Japan's difficult attempts to accommodate the loss of its Greater East Asian possessions. The most visible consequence of the dissolution of an empire is, of course, the territorial break-up and the political division of the great multi-ethnic conglomerates into a multitude of smaller national units. It is quite surprising that historical research into this area remains relatively modest, although this has been a classic topic since Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788). What historians were concerned with was the collapse of empire, but not necessarily the legacy thereof. Yet with the disintegration of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 it has become a subject of renewed interest.¹¹

8 See John Darwin: *Britain and Decolonisation. The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World*. London 1988, here 331ff.

9 Graham MacPhee/Pem Poddar (eds.): *Empire and After. Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective*. Oxford 2007.

10 Niall Ferguson: *Empire. How Britain Made the Modern World*. London 2004.

11 Cf. Berch Berberoglu: *The Legacy of Empire. Economic Decline and Class Polarization in the United States*. New York 1992, 5ff.; Jörn Leonhard/Ulrike von Hirschhausen (eds.): *Comparing Empires. Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Göttingen 2011.

The dissolution of the vast British Empire impressed even George Orwell, who had worked in Burma in the 1920s.¹² Compared with France's bitter wars in Vietnam and Algeria, Britain experienced what has often been called "a quiet and easy death". Whether this is correct, however, remains debatable given that the retreat from, for example, Palestine, Ireland, Cyprus, and India generally caused partition and many years of troubles and bloodshed. A success story, therefore, from the viewpoint of the imperialists? The cases of Kenya, Rhodesia and the Falklands illustrate no less the enormous difficulties the British faced when expected to live up to the high standards they themselves had once set. In Lord Macaulay's famous description, in his *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), the passing of imperial power was not to be regarded a problem but rather as part of a historical process of which the colonial 'mother-country' could be proud.¹³ Macaulay expected the effects of the civilizing mission to last for ever and to resist decay regardless of actual power: the achievement of the Empire was the dissemination of Britain's culture, language and technology, of the ideals of its democracy, governance and free speech, of its values, civilization, fair play – and the rules of cricket. Of course, it also served to foster commerce, expand communications and strengthen defence. If Rome's legacy lived on in Western Europe, the British Empire's legacy was believed to live on world-wide. The Empire was thus integral to Britain's nation-making story.

What was the recipe for (British) "success", a question which, of course, contains a strong element of whiggism and colonial apologia? Critics of Portuguese imperialism, for example, often pointed to the problematic construction of a Greater Portugal that until the end of Salazar's dictatorship in 1974 saw Angola, Mozambique, Goa, Macao, and the other colonies as integral parts of the "mother-country".¹⁴ Colony and nation had the same status in the construction of the constitution, in fact colonies and provinces were identically administrated according to an integrationist theory of the state and its overseas territories. This could also apply to Belgium and the Congo where we find strong elements of racism and the glorification of colonialism as expressed, for example, even in comics such as Tintin.¹⁵ Much the same could be said of the French system and the idea of a 'France Africaine' in Algeria.¹⁶ Never did the French nation-state coordinate so closely with the expansion of empire than in the period of the French Revolution and of Napoleon. The French civilizing mission openly identified with the French nation-state, with all the inconsistencies inherent in empire-building and in the character of national identity. Charles Dilke in his *Greater Britain* (1868) and John Robert Seeley in his bestseller *The Expansion of England*

12 Peter Davison (ed.): *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, vol. 2: *Burmese Days*. London 1986.

13 See Catherine Hall: *Macaulay and Son. Architects of Imperial Britain*. New Haven/London 2012, 250-253.

14 Gervase Clarence-Smith: *The Third Portuguese Empire 1825-1975. A Study in Economic Imperialism*. Manchester 1985.

15 Hergé: *Les Aventures de Tintin: Tintin au Congo* (1931, 1975), see: Kurosch Sadjadi Nasab: Tim und Struppi im Kongo. Rassistische Stereotype in Hergés Afrika, in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 43 (1998), 94-103.

16 Mahfoud Bennoune: *The Making of Contemporary Algeria, 1830-1987*. Cambridge 1988.

(1883) also formulated what could be described as an Anglo-Saxonist identification of nation and colonial expansion.¹⁷ But then, Seeley's argument was highly misleading, deriving from the notion that the British Empire was different from the Roman Empire to the extent that it was not one of conquest but the result of the extension of the state, peopled by free Europeans who were subjects of the Crown and had a common culture and religion. He deliberately left out India which would have disturbed his idea of Anglo-Saxonism. Moreover, the production of Seeley's book, first published in 1883 shortly after the British occupation of Egypt and selling more than 80,000 copies in the first two years, ceased in 1956 when Britain was once again bombarding Egypt. It became all too clear that the British imperial system was much too diverse to see the colonizer and the colonized in equal terms, and its decolonization much too complicated as far as moral or ethical issues (apart from the political, economic, administrative ones etc.) were concerned. Thus the simplification implied by the phrase 'Imperium et Libertas' or a 'Liberal Empire' was not only contradictory, but hypocritical.¹⁸

3. Empire, Liberty, and Race

The Tory Primrose League had taken this phrase as its motto, going back as far as Edmund Burke's claim in the 1780s that colonial government was a trust installed and exercised for the eventual benefit and freedom of the subjected peoples.¹⁹ In this regard the imperialists did their duty as trustees by transferring to the colonies the autonomy which the white dominions had long been granted. If liberty was seen as a binding principle between 'center' and 'periphery', the evolution of Empire into Commonwealth fulfilled this task in order to transmit the natural right to self-rule. However, if the White Man's Burden promoted the advancement of 'savages' and the civilizing mission fought against 'barbarism', if missionaries claimed to stop infanticide and suppress cannibalism – why then were the voices of the critics of empire pointing to the dangers of liberal imperialism so strong?²⁰

The answer may lie in the inconsistency between empire and liberty – imperium et libertas – as liberty could hardly be enjoyed under the daily realities of imperialism, nor after the abolition of formal

17 Charles Wentworth Dilke: *Greater Britain. A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries during 1866 and 1867*, 2 vols., London 1868; John Robert Seeley: *The Expansion of England*. London 1883.

18 Bernard Holland: *Imperium et Libertas. A Study in History and Politics*. London 1901.

19 Edmund Burke: Speech on Fox's East India Bill (1783), in: David Bromwich (ed.): *Edmund Burke. On Empire, Liberty, and Reform. Speeches and Letters*. New Haven/London 2000, 286-370; see also Frederick G. Whelan: *Edmund Burke and India. Political Morality and Empire*. Pittsburgh 1996, 46ff., 55ff.

20 Benedikt Stuchtey: *Die europäische Expansion und ihre Feinde. Kolonialismuskritik vom 18. bis in das 20. Jahrhundert*. München 2010; on Kipling/white man's burden and on the civilizing mission see 388f.

dominance when political, administrative, commercial, and educational rule was transferred, but not democratized. All colonial conquests must necessarily be violent, all colonial occupations repressive, with the precarious relationship between colonizer and colonized relying on collaboration and force, lacking legitimacy. The effect of colonial expansion is the massive disruption of an indigenous culture and its polity. Even if the intervention claims to pursue liberating and humanitarian aims, it is difficult to restore the previous state. Gibbon's above mentioned concept of decline and fall lent itself as a reference point to generations of British historians when describing the inevitable decline of an empire as the consequence of the system it had caused. The overall thesis owed a great deal to Polybios conceiving the rise of an empire (Rome) to world domination within a broader context of inexorable change and decline, including notions of stratified causality of a cycle of conquest, inflow of enervating luxuries, loss of military virtue and, ultimately, the demise of liberty. Gibbon, the contemporary of Britain's loss of her American colonies, spoke of "human misery" as a result of empires which even decolonization would not fully overcome.²¹ In the aftermath of American independence, the Empire was much less an empire of (white) settlement than one of racial diversities and oppression. Two hundred years later, in the eyes of Bertrand Russell, Empire and Commonwealth were the mud of British moral refuse, unable to overcome an unjust constitution.²² The imperial legacy was, in some cases, the partition of countries, in others the failure of state-building, that is, the construction of 'failing states', plus Britain's difficulty in finding a new role in world politics. In a number of cases, however, it was to a substantial extent the continuity of racism. Albert Memmi, professor of sociology at the University of Paris, has addressed this problem in numerous studies, thus for example in his *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du Colonisateur* (1957), where he writes that in our times of global instability and widespread violence, the causes of the failure of decolonization efforts throughout the world are becoming more obvious again.²³ While there is no need, according to Memmi, to continue to idealize the ex-colonized as victims following the anti-colonial rhetoric of the 1950s, the need to acknowledge the heritage of imperialism remains. This necessarily includes immigration and the immigrant, Johnnie from Lagos, with whom this essay began.

In France – and this could equally apply to Britain – “for the former colonist the immigrant serves as a living reminder of the country's colonial enterprise. [...] Even though he lacked enthusiasm for these exploits, the presence of the immigrant is the residue of a collective mourning, a separation born of violence,

21 John W. Burrow: *Gibbon*. Oxford 1985, 67-79; Rosamond McKitterick/Roland Quinault (eds.): *Edward Gibbon and Empire*. Cambridge 1997.

22 Bertrand Russell: *Freedom and Organization, 1814-1914*. London 1934, 448-479.

23 Albert Memmi: *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur*. Paris 1957, first published in English as *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. London 1974; see idem: *Portrait du décolonisé: arabo-musulman et de quelques autres*. Paris 2004, first published in English as *Decolonization and the Decolonized*. Minneapolis 2006, esp. the chapter on immigrants, 71-144.

where he was the losing side. Now that the divorce is final, what does his former partner want? He has what he wanted: a state, a government, even an army. Why does he want to settle in the nation he claims to despise? Even if the French national could erase the past, even if his conscience was completely clear, the presence of the immigrant prevents him from forgetting what was a glorious past for some, scandalous for others. [...] The French national would accept the immigrant if he were invisible and silent, but once a certain demographic density has been reached, the ghost assumes a terrifying consistency. To make matters worse, reassured by his growing numbers, he dares, on the contrary, to talk out loud in his native tongue and sometimes appears in his native dress. It is no easy thing to live with a bad conscience or feel historically beaten; at the very least it is difficult to reason calmly. Which leads to the astonishing confusion that arises when the problems of decolonization are raised."²⁴

Racism was a common feature of all European and non-European forms of imperialism, not least of the British.²⁵ It was a substantial ingredient of imperial ideology in any colonial system which could not easily be shaken off once imperial rule was overcome – neither in the so-called former colonial ‘center’ nor on the ‘periphery’ and certainly not during the period of gradual loss of power. When Winston Churchill was asked by Leo Amery, Secretary of State for India, to help combat the terrible famine in Bengal in 1943-1944, he agreed that relief was necessary but that “Indians are not the only people who are starving in this war”.²⁶

Did Churchill, himself in many respects a Victorian, learn from nineteenth-century writers? The stereotype of the colonial subject justifying the need for the civilising mission had already been used by Thomas Carlyle in his *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1853).²⁷ Forty years later his best-known disciple, James Anthony Froude, declared in *Oceana. Or England and Her Colonies* (1886) that “[i]t is with the wild races of human beings as with wild animals, and birds, and trees, and plants. Those only will survive who can domesticate themselves into servants of the modern forms of social development. The lion and the leopard, the eagle and the hawk, every creature of earth or air, which is wildly free, dies off or disappears; the sheep, the ox, the horse, the ass accepts his bondage and thrives and multiplies.

24 Idem, 78f.

25 Bill Schwarz: *The Only White Man in There. The Re-Racialisation of England, 1956-1968*, in: *Race and Class* 38 (1996), 65-78; Kathleen Paul: *Whitewashing Britain. Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*. London 1997, esp. chapter 6; Wendy Webster: *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965*. Oxford 2009, esp. 149-181; Laura Tabili: *A Homogeneous Society? Britain's Internal "Others", 1800-present*, in: Catherine Hall/Sonya Rose (eds.): *At Home with the Empire. Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*. Cambridge 2006, 53-76.

26 Quoted from Lawrence James: *Churchill and Empire. Portrait of an Imperialist*. London 2013, at 305; see also Madhusree Mukerjee: *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II*. New York 2010.

27 Thomas Carlyle: *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*. London 1853; Paul Rich: *Race and Empire in British Politics*. Cambridge 1990.

So it is with man. The negro submits to the conditions, becomes useful, and rises to a higher level. The Red Indian and the Maori pine away as in a cage, sink first into apathy and moral degradation, and then vanish".²⁸

Following from this, the role of race and racism in imperial as well as in decolonized societies cannot be underestimated. The British Empire had incorporated so many non-British peoples under its rule, peoples from diverse cultures and religions, that in the early twentieth century a distinction was drawn between 'citizen-subjects' and 'subject citizens', a distinction, or rather discrimination, which even found its way into immigration laws.²⁹ Seeley's notion of an Anglo-Saxonist civilization was hardly reasonable, yet in a multi-cultural Empire the senior white division allowed barriers to be erected against the non-white population. After all, the United Kingdom itself consisted of different nationalities (English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh), but nowhere was the question of nationality and citizenship more complex than in the British attitude to India – here the idea of trusteeship could quite easily be translated into a form of superiority.³⁰

The major point of reference for a regular debate of race was of course South Africa's apartheid regime, which put the British government into a difficult diplomatic position between maintaining the strong economic and historical links on the one hand, and on the other, clearly centering on South Africa in the debate on race equality by the mid-1950s, when pressure from both the political élite and the wider public to promote the rights of colonial and formerly colonial peoples increased. As a consequence the former division of the empire into old white dominions and new non-white dominions could no longer function, giving way to the idea of a multi-racial Commonwealth which no nation state was able to join, or remain within, without rejecting racial inequalities. This was first of all a moral code intended to create a coherent identity in an otherwise heterogenous Commonwealth. Former prime minister Clement Attlee put it the following way: "[...] there is one of the great points of the British Commonwealth. It transcends continents, it transcends race, colour, and religion."³¹ It also had the character of an institution beyond race and nationality, namely, one which allowed members of the Commonwealth to settle permanently in the United Kingdom and be given full citizenship rights. This, indeed, was the Dilkeian translation from

28 James Anthony Froude: *Oceana. Or England and Her Colonies*. London 1886, 300; cf. Ciaran Brady: *James Anthony Froude. An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet*. Oxford 2013, 391ff.; Duncan Bell: *The Idea of a Greater Britain. Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900*. Princeton 2007, 143-149; Theodore Koditschek: *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination. Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain*. Cambridge 2011, 151-205.

29 See Rieko Karratani: *Defining British Citizenship. Empire, Commonwealth, and Modern Britain*. London 2003; Mark Bevir: *Socialism, Civil Society, and the State in Modern Britain*, in: Frank Trentmann (ed.): *Paradoxes of Civil Society. New Perspectives on Modern German and British History*. New York/Oxford 2000, 332-351.

30 Sukanya Banerjee: *Becoming Imperial Citizens. Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire*. Durham/London 2010, esp. 150-190.

31 Clement Attlee: Presidential Address. *The Development of the Commonwealth*, delivered to the members of the Birmingham and Midland Institute on 14 October 1957. Birmingham 1957, at 15.

the Roman to the British Empire when the idea of a 'Greater Britain' applied to any subject of the Crown. In the post-1945 world Britain began to experience what this meant. Immigration from the Commonwealth, at first largely for economic reasons, rose to more than 100,000 in the early 1960s and one and a half million by the mid-1970s, mostly from the West Indies, India, South Asia, and Ireland.³² Immigration could have helped to present Britain in the liberal light of an open and multicultural country. But with immigration the colonial frontier came back to England, or, it could be argued, it came 'home'. This term is, of course, quite ambivalent, if not disturbing, alluding to an intimacy of home and empire which does not easily reveal itself. Many careers and family fortunes were dependent on income from the colonies, not least from slavery, and for that reason an understanding of race, civilization, and civility made the Empire not distant or external but instead a space, for example, for social experiments which were not possible in the 'mother-country'. Public opinion soon complained that the increasing number of 'colored' people coming to the British Isles was leading to increasing resentment among large sections of the British population. It was complicated to identify oneself as either an Englishman or a British Asian. Crime, its rise, a growing feeling of incivility in society, a dwindling satisfaction with public services – all this provoked the romantic wish for the old white England to re-emerge.³³ Most programs and policies formulated for the immigrant communities in the post-war period were based on ethnic rather than faith criteria, a fact which Muslims resented in particular as they wished to be regarded as faith communities. The affair caused by the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in the late 1980s demonstrated this tension to the point that racial harmony was an intellectual construction as much as religious harmony. Both needed to be promoted.³⁴ The common syntax of white ethnicity, hitherto embodied in the language of white masculinity, was threatened by the confused, fantasized conception of the whites as a defeated race. Of course, this is not to suggest that only the moment of decolonization brought into being the moment of racism, and certainly not a long-lived extremism, not even among all members of the Conservative Party. Yet many conservatives quickly mutated from Empire-enthusiasts to supporters of a nationalism which was associated with Little-Englandism.³⁵ Obviously this stood in sharp contrast to the creation of the empire. While Seeley could tell his readers that the Empire was "a vast English nation" with no need for doctrine because it had been submerged in a wider missionary nationalism, 70 years later political intellectuals were less certain about this. However, the moment the Empire/Commonwealth

32 Franz-Josef Brüggemeier: *Geschichte Großbritanniens im 20. Jahrhundert*. München 2010, 237f., 269-273.

33 Cf. Kathleen Burk: Introduction, in: idem (ed.): *The British Isles since 1945*. Oxford 2003, 1-17, at 16.

34 Peter Catterall: The Party and Religion, in: Anthony Seldon/Stuart Ball (eds.): *Conservative Century. The Conservative Party since 1900*. Oxford/New York 1994, 637-670, here at 663.

35 Brian Harrison: *Seeking a Role. The United Kingdom, 1951-1970*. Oxford 2009, 79ff., 101-114, 435-442.

came under threat of losing global power and supremacy was the very moment when Englishness and the concept of Little-Englandism were reborn. Englishness came to be celebrated when the Empire was being disintegrated. If there was an English *Sonderweg* after all, it was not political but cultural and not organized through political institutions but through literature and the arts. At the very core of empire, as it were, was a state of mind which as such formed social behaviour. This included racism and approaches to immigrants.

The immigration issue had many implications: race riots about social services, housing, local welfare, and economic benefits – anything that was scarce; moreover, unemployment rates that were high among the immigrants; and likewise the point that immigrants were prepared to take jobs that British workers would not accept. Most notable were the white and violent riots of September 1958 in Notting Hill and Nottingham which resulted in a great deal of ambivalence about the impact of Britain's liberal, decent, and tolerant legislation when compared with the USA's and South Africa's color bars.³⁶ The riots that brought the Empire's implications to Britain's doorsteps caused violent discussions between supporters and opponents of restrictions of immigration; ultimately, society was confronted with the question of whether it opted for (1) a self-imposed moderation on the British Isles, (2) the Commonwealth, (3) the bizarre model of an 'imperial Commonwealth',³⁷ or (4) uncompromisingly joining the European Common Market. None of these options looked particularly promising. But the riots also resulted in at least two important inventions: The Institute of Race Relations which was fundamental in pushing forward laws against racial discrimination (1965, 1968, 1976), and since 1959 the Notting Hill Carnival created by Claudia Jones, which until the present day has become a phenomenal success. "Has Britain a Colour Bar?", asked a popular television documentary transmitted in January 1955. It portrayed immigrants, their customs, and standards of life. Prejudice against immigrants was prevalent, as the *Birmingham Post* conceded, and was much more present than official circles would have accepted.³⁸

The heated, sometimes poisoned political and public debates about immigration resulted in 1962 in the controversial Commonwealth Immigration Act which abolished the right of unrestricted entry by requiring immigrants to obtain employment vouchers. It ended the 'open door' policy which had been inaugurated in 1948 by the British Nationality Act.³⁹ What followed were intense public controversies about the relevance of Empire and Commonwealth for England, the significance of the history of colonial expansion

36 Wendy Webster (2009): *Englishness and Empire*, 159ff.

37 Lord Elton: *Imperial Commonwealth*. London 1945.

38 *Birmingham Post*, 1 February 1955.

39 For an excellent comparison between France and the UK see: Imke Sturm-Martin: *Zuwanderungspolitik in Großbritannien und Frankreich. Ein historischer Vergleich (1945-1962)*. Frankfurt/M. 2001, here 247ff.

for the 'mother-country', and suggestions such as from the Labour Women's Organisation in London, to improve education and development in the colonies thus making immigration to Britain unnecessary. In April 1964, *The Times* published an anonymous article under the heading "Patriotism Based on Reality not on Dreams. By a Conservative", in which the author portrayed the Commonwealth as an enormous failure destined to ruin Britain and to inflict social and political damage that could hardly be repaired.⁴⁰ Only two days later, however, an editorial in the same paper distanced itself from the previous article arguing: "Multiracialism is mankind's only way forward to universal peace and, on a world scale, the only way in which Britain leads."⁴¹

4. Immigration and Identity

The following tendencies become clear: firstly, a turning back of the idea of a common citizenship; secondly, a narrowing of the definition of nations and nationalities within the Commonwealth; and, thirdly, the placing of economic benefits above moral considerations. Enoch Powell's notorious "rivers of blood" speech is one of the many political low points of this time when the public debate was infiltrated by racism, xenophobia, and a willingness to use the immigrant question for party-political interests.⁴² It provoked heated debate, played with fears, warned that US-style race riots (notably in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957) would happen in Britain and that immigrants would eventually overrun schools and hospitals. The hostility to 'colored' immigrants as expressed by the National Front and the League of Empire Loyalists was born not of nostalgia – as purported – but of the failure of the state to prepare its citizens for more tolerance. Furthermore, the state was unable to sufficiently inform the people about where the immigrants were coming from, not even providing basic knowledge about their political and cultural backgrounds. From this point of view immigration is probably not as good a barometer to judge popular attitudes to decolonization as would be the construction of national identity – or, rather, its failure. Imperial legacy, it seems, was closely connected to the legacy of the nation. But if Britain was to transform internally alongside the decolonization of its empire, immigration initially prevented it from becoming a modern and multi-racial society.

40 S.n.: Patriotism Based on Reality not on Dreams. By a Conservative, in: *The Times* (2 April 1964), at 13: "To have our laws so far out of relation with realities was the course of the massive coloured immigration in the last decade which had inflicted social and political damage that will take decades to obliterate."

41 S.n.: Editorial, in: *The Times*, (4 April 1964), at 9.

42 Peter Brooke: India, Post-Imperialism and the Origins of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" Speech, in: *Historical Journal* 50 (2007) 3, 669-687; see also the chapter on immigration, in: J. Enoch Powell: *Freedom and Reality* (ed. by John Wood). London 1968, 213-237.

Conservative patriotism only instrumentalized these nostalgic longings. Yet its views were deeply flawed. It suggested that empire was in a way marginal to British life and national self-understanding, that it was not the product of a grand design but rather of European and global rivalries, and that most Britons knew little and cared less about the spread of the Empire.⁴³ But were the British setting up communities with no real attachment to the countries they ruled? Were they just packing their things and leaving the colonies once they were no longer welcome, without provoking any decline in national self-esteem? Certainly not. This marginalist point of view seems to allow the logic consequence that while the British empire played no essential role in the world, formerly colonial populations had no moral or political rights to claim entry into the 'mother-country' after their being 'decolonized'. In other words: the civilizing mission was a business abroad but no green card for the newly 'civilized' for becoming an integral part of British society. Among others, Catherine Hall has so impressively demonstrated that empire was by far not a marginal enterprise, that it needed ideology, hierarchies, racism, notions of masculinity, the fantasies of omnipotence, and the clear divide between rulers and ruled, that is, between 'metropole' and 'colony'.⁴⁴ Colonial rule was a business based on domination and destruction. Critics of empire not only saw this but also its consequences: namely that many colonial rulers brought home with them habits and forms of rule that later shaped public opinion and the political discourse in parliament, for example. Attitudes towards colonialism thus left deep roots in European societies and became integral in the political self-understanding, including a pervasive racism 'at home', the longing for continued global greatness, and the tendency for an escapist view of the past with little room for confronting and criticizing one's own wrong-doings. In many respects, there should be no place for melancholia or for nostalgia after the end of imperialism.⁴⁵

If the imperial idea of a cultural civilization transcending local, regional, or ethnic differences failed to provide the political coherence that Britain had hoped and believed would allow it to remain a leading world organization in the form of the Commonwealth, and if, in consequence, the decline of the Empire was facilitated relatively easily, it failed because British imperialism had been different from, for example, Portuguese or French imperialism. John Robert Seeley's idea of the extension of the British state producing a kind of integrative and common citizenship for all subjects of the Empire did not work out. Thanks to the incoherence of the imperial connections, major traumas like those the French went through were prevented. What could not be prevented, however, were the many unstable and irritating narratives about race and immigration that revealed at least as much about Britain's post-imperial identity as about the

43 For this interpretation see Bernard Porter: *The AbsentMinded Imperialists. Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*. Oxford/New York 2004.

44 Catherine Hall: *Civilising Subjects. Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*. Cambridge 2002, here 9ff.

45 Benedikt Stuchtey (2010): *Die europäische Expansion*, 373-377.

decolonization experience as such.⁴⁶

Or should one rather speak of a distinct *English* post-imperial identity? The difference could be made between the unifying power of Britishness in its commitment to a globalized expansion which had been very strong in the eighteenth century,⁴⁷ while Englishness emerged in the moment when the Empire's supremacy was challenged, even threatened as around 1900, and was strengthened under the impact of decolonization. Essentially, it was the alleged homogeneity of Englishness, the concept of a private, domestic, intimate, and white Englishness, and the 'integrity' of the English nation that felt threatened by decolonization and the emergence of the Commonwealth and its legacies. Thus the Commonwealth was not trusted, in the belief it was just the rhetorical prolongation of the imperial past into a politically harmless present. The Expansion of England, as it were, was questioned as was its legacy abroad and 'at home'. But the complicated and problematic relationship between the 'internal' space of the nation and the 'external' space of colonial expansion lived on as long as the descendants of citizens of former colonies experienced the persistence of racial hierarchies that were inherited from the imperial ideology. In the end the debates about the empire, the problematic nature of immigration and all the aspects connected to it showed a kind of mental decolonization and a steadily increasing alienation between England and its former colonial empire. In short: the farewell from the Empire meant a farewell from the illusion of a British, or English special path in history which had claimed that England was particularly well-equipped for dealing with the foreigner. This became strikingly clear in July 2005 when the London transport system was bombed following the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. It became clear because it showed the difficulties of a multicultural society in Britain, the denial of this, and the reassurance of a unified British identity, when it was made public that the young men who were responsible for the bombings were British Muslims, British citizens who had grown up in the Midlands and the North East of England.

There is one particular point which needs to be considered more thoroughly in research: the voices of the immigrants themselves.⁴⁸ How far were these people integrated into British society when it was reconfiguring itself in the postwar world? What other reasons did they have for coming to the United Kingdom, apart from looking for a job? How did they view their own new lives far away from their homes, or did Britain become their new home? And how were they perceived by the average British person? Contrasting these two very different worlds illustrates that while formerly colonial peoples regarded the empire with

46 See Sarah Hestra: *The Counter-Memorial Impulse in Twentieth-Century English Fiction*. London 2009, 148-156.

47 Linda Colley: *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven/London 1992.

48 Shompa Lahiri: South Asians in Post-Imperial Britain: Decolonisation and Imperial Legacy, in: Stuart Ward (ed.): *British Culture and the End of Empire*. Manchester 2001, 200-216.

increasingly low esteem, metropolitan Britains were still firmly caught up in it. In 1945 Britain had not put her imperial past behind her, the often mentioned 'farewell' was not complete, and it did not mean that the memory of empire was quickly receding in public culture. Quite the contrary: the Suez crisis of 1956 probably proved such a shock to the political establishment because the empire *and* the process of decolonization lay at the very heart of national identity. If the empire was a matter of status and prestige, it was not easily given away by those who grew up and were socialized within it and whose political, economic, cultural, and social careers were connected to it. Thus, it was a generational question, too.

It is tempting to look for a direct connection between racial prejudice in post-1945 Britain and its imperial origins.⁴⁹ However, if discrimination is explained entirely on the grounds of colonial heritage, how then do we deal with the intolerance of society, or parts of it, with those members who are not 'colored' colonial immigrants from the Commonwealth, such as the Irish, for example?⁵⁰ The majority of 19th and 20th century English authors has struggled to assimilate Ireland into the imperial family. Rather it was likened to the 'primitive' states in Asia and Africa and to the long list of stereotypes attributed to 'savages'. In the case of Ireland, catholicism played an important role for the English's discrimination and for the Irish's classification as being unfit for mixed marriages. It seems that the case study mentioned at the beginning has something to tell us about interracial/intercultural marriages and their reception. Johnnie came to Britain when his host country was about to decline economically. Using the immigrants as scapegoats for the loss of political and material power almost suggested itself, as would be the case in any society. But this was not necessarily a national phenomenon. It could be restricted to regional, local, or communal conditions such as the labor market and where it was particularly difficult to find a job or reasonably paid employment.⁵¹

Interracial or intercultural marriages or relationships were neither an absolute rarity nor, of course, were they a common feature. Still, amongst white people, inter-racial marriage was strongly disapproved of.⁵² A Gallup opinion poll in 1961 asked the question: "Do you think that marriage between a white person and a coloured person is, or is not, advisable?" A few years later the question was changed into: "Would you approve of your sister, or your daughter, marrying a coloured person?" The headline of the article referred to in the beginning of this essay, ran: "Would you let your daughter marry a ne-

49 Z. Layton-Henry: *The Politics of Immigration. Race and Race Relations in Postwar Britain*. London 1992; Robert Colls: *Identity of England*. Oxford/New York 2002, 179ff.

50 Jodi Burkett: *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain. Britishness, 'Race', and the Radical Left in the 1960s*. London 2013, 191-195.

51 Andrew Thompson: *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. London 2005, 179-202.

52 Dilip Hiro: *Black British, White British. A History of Race Relations in Britain*. London 1971, 358ff.

gro?” In the later 1950s and the 1960s about seventy to ninety per cent of all people who were asked this question disapproved. Interestingly, it first became topical only when black soldiers, either from the colonies or from the US, became more visible in British cities and began forming relationships with white women. These white women served as the guardians of national boundaries (although they could equally be seen as potential entries to harm) – they were at the very heart of the family and its concept of the domestic frontier: an internal and external frontier between colonizer and colonized, white and black. Which family? Probably not the larger, multiracial family of the members of the Commonwealth. Quite the opposite. As Bill Schwarz has shown, the white settler communities in empire such as those in Rhodesia provided the opponents of immigration in the metropole with the necessary vocabulary: both regarded themselves vulnerable and embattled and both in defence of Englishness.⁵³

Moreover, it was not necessarily a national matter, and nationwide polls were not taken on the subject. Rather it was a matter of class, clearly separating the working-class from the middle-class milieu: the former experienced more social, economic and psychological problems by far. Soon ties with friends and family came under tension, and the same applied to the children who in questionnaires were classified as ‘colored’, not ‘half-white’. Children of mixed marriages also tended to socialize more with ‘colored’ children. Research of the time describes this cultural and psychological ambivalence as one of the obstacles to a social and ethnic pluralism and to the ideal of a racially amalgamated society of Great Britain in the 1950s and 60s. Accordingly, children of inter-racial relationships rather tended to identify entirely with ‘colored’ children. In some respects this is reminiscent of Mid-Victorian attitudes towards racial mixture and the nearly unbridgeable gulf between the social worlds of Europeans and non-Europeans.⁵⁴

5. Conclusion

Against the background of a shifting research interest moving from a focus on the seemingly inevitable decline and dissolution of empires to a differentiated analysis of integrative and disintegrative elements of imperial rule in multiethnic societies and their long-term consequences, this essay has concentrated on a set of general questions: Is it possible to identify lines of continuity (in racial thinking and in constructing identities) between the imperial past and post-imperial realities after the Second World War? How did imperial legacies influence the self-images of post-imperial Britain and her society under the impact of immigration?

53 Bill Schwarz: *Reveries of Race. The Closing of the Imperial Moment*, in: Becky Conekin/Frank Mort/Chris Waters (eds.): *Moments of Modernity. Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*. London 1999, 189-207.

54 Deborah Cohen: *Family Secrets. Living with Shame from the Victorians to the Present Day*. London 2013, 3-37.

Recently, since empires have become the focus of both socio-economic dependencies between ‘centers’ and ‘peripheries’ as well as of their function of stabilizing and integrating multiethnic societies, research questions have taken new directions. While attention paid to obvious historical breaks has not decreased, questions are now also being asked about historical continuities, i.e. continuities which linked imperial experiences with those of post-imperial states and societies. Some of the basic ideas of this essay are located at this point: Where were the continuities between imperial pasts and post-imperial developments beyond the programmatic demarcations after 1945, particularly as regards ethnic policies? Were political self-understanding and collective self-images impregnated by the history of the former empire?

It seems appropriate to bring British colonial history and the history of decolonization into a closer context with the experiences of other European (and non-European) colonial powers. For all cases, similar overlapping questions as to the criteria of comparison of the imperial legacies apply. Probably, the relevance of this approach lies in the diachronous perspective and that the very different traditions of European imperialisms which produced very different legacies need to be shown. As regards the debate about the British Empire, this has proved to be quite fruitful. The increasingly intensive debate about ‘Englishness’ and ‘Britishness’, which has continued since the 1990s, has shifted the focus onto the ways in which the Empire shaped how the British perceived themselves in the twentieth century.⁵⁵ In this respect there is probably a difference between continental European empires and the British colonial system. The evidence lies in the relationship between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’. As Eric Hobsbawm has argued, the transformation from empire to post-imperial states was much more difficult for the former colonies of the overseas empires. The changes to which their societies were subjected during colonial rule were more far-reaching and much deeper than the European cases where the division between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ was not so clear. Hobsbawm’s argument runs that in the crucial phase of decolonization there was a lack of clearly identifiable successors in a position to stabilize the new post-imperial states.⁵⁶ In this sense, the definition of ethnic and cultural identity on the basis of physical appearance has been particularly challenged in inter-racial relationships by stereotypes and prejudices, whether this is the result of the postcolonial world or not. After all, empire deeply unsettled Britain as did Britain unsettle its former colonial possessions. However, as the author of the article in the *Picture Post* argued: “Neighbours can draw the curtains, but they can’t stop the sun from shining.”⁵⁷

55 Bridget Byrne: Crisis of Identity? Englishness, Britishness, and Whiteness, in: Graham MacPhee/Prem Poddar (eds.): *Empire and After. Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective*, Oxford/New York 2007, 139-158.

56 Eric Hobsbawm: *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism*. London 2007, 73-81.

57 Trevor Philpott (1954): ‘Would You Let Your Daughter Marry A a Negro?’, here at 23.

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