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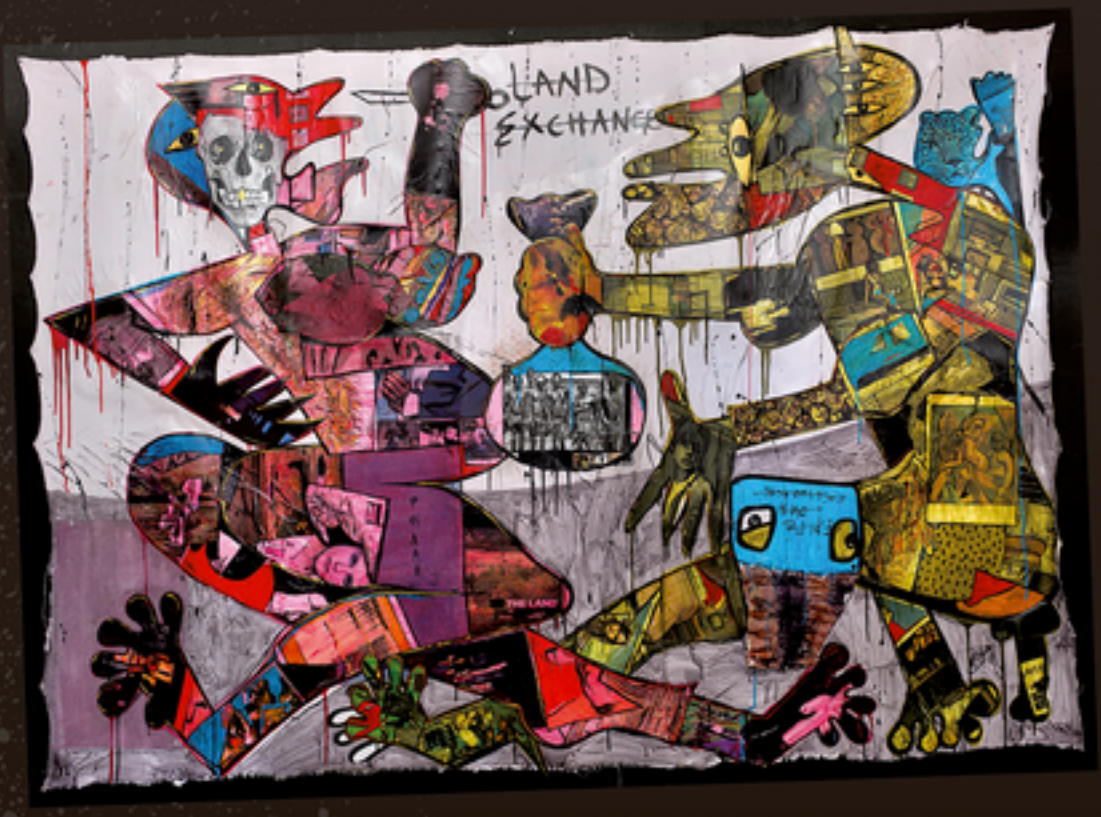

DECOLONIZING THE CRIMINAL QUESTION

COLONIAL LEGACIES, CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS

OXFORD

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Decolonizing the Criminal Question

Colonial Legacies, Contemporary Problems

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Criminal Questions, Colonial Hinterlands, Personal Experience

A Symptomatic Reading

Rod Earle, Alpa Parmar, and Coretta Phillips

Introduction

In this chapter we consider the challenges and opportunities that a postcolonial practice might allow for a criminological analysis of offending, punishment, and desistance. While categorical, experiential links between colonial dynamics and contemporary experiences of criminal justice may be challenging to verify empirically, we argue that there is methodological and theoretical merit in seeking to understand contemporary individual experiences through the lens of race and colonialism. We suggest that analysis of the relationship between race and crime is enriched by connecting criminological analysis with historical colonial experience and personal biography in the present. It is by tracing how patterns of race and crime extend into lived experience of colonial legacies, despite the formal historical abeyance of such regimes, that a clearer understanding may emerge of how they shape our sensibilities, social interactions, narratives, and institutions.

A wide variety of cultural and social theorists have repeatedly drawn attention to the way wilful ignorance of, or selective amnesia about, Britain's colonial past impoverishes an understanding of how its footprints step steadily through the present day (Gilroy, 2004). Criminology is either a slow learner or has been particularly myopic towards the colonial and imperial foundations of penal institutions, concepts of order and governance, and categorization of different racial groups (Brown, 2005; Agozino, 2003; Brown, 2017). We are concerned that the almost insatiable appetite for criminology in the UK that we see in burgeoning undergraduate applications to study crime-related subjects stems, at least in part, from prospective students seeing in criminology the exciting figure of the murderous deviant, the threatening 'other', and the prospects of control, without recognizing their colonial and racist implications. We are not convinced that on graduating their vision will be any clearer.

While accepting that criminology in the UK is a diverse and vibrant discipline, it cannot be said that confronting the colonial origins of these imaginary figures and the ensuing centralization of criminal justice as a response, are as dynamic as they need to be. Instead, criminology tends towards an exclusive and instrumental focus

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on its traditional problematics of control, with questions of policing, street crime, and managing prison populations leading the discipline. Despite the orthodox focus on cops, courts, and corrections, the three 'C's, being subject to continual critical scrutiny, there remains a relative silence surrounding the structuring violence of colonization (Agozino, 2003) and wider failures to engage consistently with race, racialization, and racism (Phillips et al., 2019).

In this chapter we seek to develop and demonstrate a way of centralizing rather than marginalizing the colonial dynamics of race in criminological analysis. As Leonardo (2009) has argued, to get beyond race, it is necessary to go through race. There are no shortcuts and the current vogue in denying the salience of race, whether it is in attacks on critical race theory in the USA and Australia or the Sewell report (CRED, 2021) in the UK, is intended to constrain, obstruct, or divert the liberatory potential of making the longer journey.

Trying to tease out some of the connections and routes through which we can appreciate the durability of colonialism and racism in the present is not an easy undertaking. References to traces of empire can be misleading if they simply seek to evoke mechanistic causal chains. Stoler (2016) emphasizes the importance of tracing enduring fissures in imperial relations, rather than assuming there are convenient 'historical shortcuts to show that every contemporary injustice can be folded into an originary colonial tale' (Stoler, 2016, p. 169). At the same time, of course, racial identities are constantly made and remade, always in relation, always in flux or unstable (Gunaratnam, 2003) in sharp and ironic contra-distinction to their original characterization as fixed in nature.

In this chapter we try to emphasize and expose the ways in which race is historically recursive rather than routinely repetitive. The patterns that emerge in criminal justice systems are not built on fixed racial identities or straightforward colonial legacies but on dynamic social practice. We use three case studies from our empirical research to explore how the colonial hinterlands of everyday experience might inform their social practice in relation to criminal justice. Our intention is to demonstrate how criminological research might develop further possibilities for richer and more nuanced accounts of the intersection of criminal justice systems with lived experience of coloniality. Our argument with criminology is the extent to which such possibilities are neglected.

Methodological Approach—Symptomatic Reading

We are mindful of the need to be alert to discontinuities as well as continuities in the colonial past and the postcolonial present (Brown, 2017). Our aim is to develop and enable stronger narratives that can account for the complexities and exigencies of the ways in which colonial history is discernible in contemporary personal experience. Colonial and postcolonial linkages are rarely self-evident or easily traced (Stoler, 2016) and we need better ways and more experience of recognizing how they may remain implicit, just out of view (Parma et al ., 2022). We need to be more alert to the ways they are allowed to slip out of view and, significantly, are often only retrieved by a minority of scholars and minority ethnic scholars. It is frequently relatively clear,

for example, that ontological proxies of race can often surface through stories about family, culture, migration, belonging, nationality, and in how research participants explain what constitutes home(s) (Gunaratnam, 2003; Bloch, 2018). There is then the dual task of interpretive excavation to understand how individuals negotiate and articulate the racialized social locations in which they find themselves and acknowledging their salience. This involves appreciating the textures of how race is told or indeed, not told, or how it might be referenced in opaque terms in individual narratives.

Interviews inevitably entail joint construction, negotiation, and interaction, and we have found Althusser's ideas about symptomatic reading (Althusser and Balibar, 2009) to be particularly valuable in the approach we are adopting. Symptomatic reading is a strategy for interpreting the 'latent content' behind the 'manifest content' of a text. The intention of our symptomatic reading is to identify synonyms and substitutes for race and racialized experience. Our concern is with the way race works ideologically in the Althusserian sense that ideology offers people a way to live through the various contradictions and tensions in the conditions of their existence. These take shape in daily practice and in the form of the lives our respondents refer to in biographical interviews. Our interest in ideology seeks to problematize the sociological appreciation of race as an innocent social construct, as an aspect of social 'diversity', and emphasize the way race operates as an ideological force in society securing division and hierarchy in the interest of some people and at the expense of others.

If we want to appreciate the magnitude of race and racism in questions of crime, social order, and disorder, and draw out implications that appear to have been missed or are simply missing, a simple or 'innocent' reading of the criminal question (Aliverti et al., 2021) is not enough. This is particularly the case in a discipline as 'white' as criminology when questions of 'white innocence', the predispositions that white people have to neglect race, miss race, or otherwise deny the salience of race, are only just beginning to be identified (Smith and Linnemann, 2015; Phillips et al., 2019).

Our argument revolves around the life stories narrated by men entangled in a convergence between racialization and criminalization and where both have become thoroughly entwined in the general modalities of government. These involve the most powerful and potentially violent of state agencies, the criminal justice system, becoming increasingly proximate to a person's everyday life. These agencies carry with them all the racializing force of their colonial history. To illustrate these dynamics, we draw from a series of qualitative interviews. These are deliberately selective in that they seek perspectives from men variously involved in criminal justice and whose ethnicities align with the categories of 'black', 'Asian', and 'white'. In doing so, we take seriously Aliverti et al.'s (2021, p. 307) invocation towards acts of political recognition that centralize 'those most often invisibilized, silenced and side-lined in contemporary criminal justice practices and in knowledge constructions'.

The first two case studies emerge from a life history study with minority ethnic young men. They are of black Jamaican origin (Cairo) and Bangladeshi Muslim (Rafan) origin. They capture some of the processual interactions between structural positionings and internal, subjective worlds. Cairo and Rafan were research participants in a study drawing from a purposive sample of twenty young, minority ethnic Londoners, examining how racial orders are mobilized and contested in everyday life. Both were from a volunteer pool in contact with community development and sports

organizations, mosques, and other youth groups, in four London boroughs in 2017. To specifically address the hidden presence of whiteness, we include a symptomatic reading of material from a prison study conducted by Phillips and Earle in 2006–2008. The research centred on examining the construction and negotiation of ethnic and masculine identities in prisoners' lives, particularly as they intersected with faith, nationality, and locality. This third interview provides insight into an adaptive repertoire among white identities in the postcolonial period that emerged after the end of the Second World War as national independence movements secured some separation from pre-war colonial domination. Taken together, the interviews offer illustrations of how we can become more alert to enduring colonial traces that operate in a person's life, materially, symbolically, culturally, and psychically. The analysis uses an approach which seeks out, through a close reading, reflection, and collaborative discussion between us, the sentiments, feelings, ambiguities, silences, and controversies, that animate race in postcolonial everyday experience. While the analysis of each case study is led by a single author, it is the result of extensive collaboration underpinned by our respective ethnic identities and positioning within the racial hierarchies of the colonial order. The specific contribution of this chapter, then, is to supplement and encourage diverse approaches to decolonizing criminology through revisiting empirical studies, developing teamwork, and collaborative analysis to better inform our understanding of challenging and obscured postcolonial dynamics (Agozino, 2003; Carrington et al., 2016; Carrington et al., 2019; Aliverti et al., 2021). By tracing the way in which empire extends beyond history and reappears in personal lives, our own as well as those of our research subjects, we become more appreciative of the instability and persistence of racial stereotypes as well as their inherent malleability both in imperial times and now. Our approach follows Stoler (2016) in finding durable and harmful patterns in the debris of empire scattered through the biographies of our respondents.

Cairo's Jamaican Excursions and Versions

At the time of interview, Cairo was seventeen and living with his parents and siblings in London. He was interviewed by Coretta Phillips, a black/mixed race Londoner. Asked about his nationality, Cairo was emphatic: 'I'm Jamaican … Yes, I've got British passport … I'm Jamaican by blood.' Cairo's narrative throughout the interview is infused with a deep sense of love, affection, and loyalty to his Jamaican-born parents. He credited his father with providing him with a moral upbringing. As the only 'boy child' there was a strong sense of familial responsibility in Cairo's narrative, as he understood the paternal expectation that he would portray himself in a respectful matter in the local community, never diminishing the family name.

Taking Stoler's (2016) lead, we acknowledge that colonial remnants can 'be there' and then 'not there', activated, reactivated, and then receding from view and effect. More helpful, she suggests, is to think in terms of 'processes of partial reinscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations' (ibid, p. 27). Cairo was aware that his mother would contact the police or send him 'back home' for informal social control, 'Jamaican-style', if she found out he was involved in anything illegal. The option of informal social control for school misbehaviour or offending are often routine

and transnational in scope for children with familial ties to Britain's former colonial territories in Africa and the Caribbean (Bailey et al., 2014). Cairo's behaviour at school radically improved when he believed he was at risk of being sent 'back home' to Jamaica for physical chastisement. Describing his school experiences, he describes his anger at teachers who he believed deliberately provoked his temper to test him—'They'd press my button for me to have a reaction.' Cairo recounts that his troublesome behaviour at school, provoked or otherwise, was effectively halted when the prospect of 'back home' social control became an imminent possibility. The threat Cairo sensed of being sent to relatives in Jamaica and of being beaten with a cane in their secondary schools was enough to motivate him to moderate his behaviour in school, whatever the provocations.

Imperializing Merton?

Cairo always assumed he would encounter the racial hierarchies and poverty that frames the lives of many young black Londoners. In relation to employment and financial security, he observed that 'if he's [a black man] saying the same thing as a white man first, the white man is still going to make more money'. Recognizing the impact of colonialism on global as well as local inequalities, as Aliverti et al. (2021) urge, we must more comprehensively unpack how persistent racialized differentials unravel or are threaded through a person's life. When Cairo's mum was ill and bedridden and his dad was only intermittently employed and bringing money into the house, Cairo describes his predicament:

> A few ceilings were leaking, it wasn't that bad but obviously food-wise it was bad … We went through this rough patch. My mum developed thyroids in here, she had a problem with her back so she basically in bed every day … my dad, he's trying. It's not only him that can look after the whole house but he was trying. It got to a point where literally like we were scraping looking for food inside the cupboards to see what we can make up … It's like I got to a point where your belly is hurting you … You feel like your belly is eating itself.

Cairo goes on to describe how his illicit solutions involving fraudulent online credit-card scams 'literally fed me, put food in my mouth'. By 'frauding it out', as he put it, he was able to supplement the family's budget to provide food and household essentials. Using his computer skills, Cairo used the dark web to hack credit-card accounts, then bought iPhones that were sold on locally through a network of friends and associates. While subsistence might have provided the spur to Cairo's offending, he was candid that he went much further. The proceeds were also about underwriting a desired lifestyle involving the designer labels associated with wealth and success, and extravagant quantities of cash.

There is no easy divide between his 'noble cause' offending and the casual acquisition of unearned consumer goods. His interview includes numerous stories of how widely his predicaments and solutions are shared among his peer group. Sometimes he is 'putting food in their mouths' but it is noticeable how easily this vocabulary of

necessity and survival slips across to the provision of material 'luxuries' and accessorizing a lifestyle. Cairo's descriptions of his peer group's 'starving' appetites refers deliberately and explicitly to designer labels as much as it does food and household necessities. In Mbembe's (2017) work, there is a powerfully evocative reflection on the aesthetic and cultural violence of colonialism alongside its economic and political dimensions. His analysis describes the seductive activation of desires that infused relations between African elites, traders, and Europeans, all variously positioned in the transatlantic slave trade. Disconcertingly, Mbembe maintains that it was not just bodies that were stolen as the colonized people were captured by the fantasy of wealth, enchanted by the possibilities of access to objects and goods sold by Europeans. In this sense, Africans drawn into colonial relations were compulsively invested in a potent logic of consumption that saw material goods within an emotional and affective economy created by a climate of enviable wealth. For Mbembe, the contemporary 'erotics of merchandise' should be understood as a kind of symbolic fetishization, a materialistic cult, in which desires for commodities penetrated deep into the core of imperial subjectivity.

For Mbembe (2017, p. 103), it is in 'mobilizing the memory of the colony' and the ways this produces psychic images that have a motive force even to those who have not witnessed colonialism directly that we find particularly helpful. It is this history of colony in the lived-present, background, foreground, and underground, that is so invisible, so unfelt, among white people, but that so insistently frames black people's subjectivity. There was certainly a vivid sense of this in Cairo's talk, if you looked.

There is much more to learn about the phenomenology of subjection—the existential and psychic costs of ongoing racializing practices for black male bodies—which has so far escaped criminological attention (Yancy, 2017). The affective content of both criminalization and racialization is far more pervasive, destructive, wearing, injuring to the psychic self on an ongoing basis, than is recognized within mainstream criminology. 'The Black Man is also the name of a wound' is how Mbembe (2017, p. 18) puts it. While we may not recommend a full detour through the Afropessimism literature, criminologists cannot entirely neglect it.

Rafan's Criminal Justice Rejections and Recreations

Rafan, a twenty-year-old young man, was interviewed in East London by Alpa Parmar and was of Asian Bangladeshi Muslim background. He had been caught up in the criminal justice system for a violent episode at school and had also tried dealing drugs, although without any great success or relish. He had himself been the victim of crime on various occasions, including having been robbed in his local neighbourhood. At the time of the interview, Rafan was focusing on his work as a security guard and sought meaning, purpose, and achievement in life through this employment. His work in security and his aspiration to progress to become a professional bodyguard aligned with his bold and ambitious aspirations, as revealed in the interview: he was in the process of setting up an events company which specialized in security.

While at school, Rafan had been involved in a fight which left the other boy seriously injured. Rafan described it as 'the stupidest thing he'd ever done' and was remorseful

about the incident, although felt unfairly blamed as the sole perpetrator in an incident that he felt involved more people. He said other pupils of the school were also 'to blame' but that no one supported him, and no witnesses came forward in the ensuing police investigation and court case. Rafan was excluded from school and referred to what he called a 'behaviour' school from which he largely withdrew his engagement.

Violence was a relatively normal part of Rafan's life, and he admitted to having 'punch-ups and scuffles' on a regular basis. During the interview, Rafan seemed intent on presenting an idealized version of himself, adopting what appeared to be a highly mannered and staged thoughtful demeanour. His responses seemed to lack spontaneous authenticity but, as the interview unfolded, it became more apparent that what appeared as a contrived self-presentation was, in fact, likely to be Rafan's preferred mode of self-presentation. It was an approach to life in which he liked to project an image of a 'perfect ideal' of himself. From Alpa's point of view, it seemed to operate as a defence mechanism upon which he learned to convince himself that he was moving forward and beyond the snare of the criminal justice system into which he had so nearly fallen. The court case against him was discontinued but not before he had felt the force of its capacity to define his future. Taking back control of his future thus had a full presence in Rafan's life.

The postcolony

In Rafan's self-conscious performance of himself there are echoes of the kinds of psycho-social postcolonial analysis developed by Homi Bhabha (1994). Bhabha's essay on 'sly civility' in *The Location of Culture*, advances an argument about the way the colonized adapt to the force and expectations of the coloniser by adopting certain mannerisms that reflect those expectations, while simultaneously indicating and rejecting their false authority. In Bhabha's analysis, the colonizer is always asking 'the native' to provide a narrative of themselves, but 'the native's' recognition that this demand is always also a plea by the colonizer for the native to 'tell us why we are here' is profoundly unsettling of the colonial hierarchy. The exposure of colonial uncertainty and the existential insecurity of the colonizer is subversive because it triggers, according to Bhabha, the inevitable paranoia at the heart of the colonial relationship—'why don't they love us? why are they trying to kill us? why do they hate me?' While Bhabha's arguments sometimes tend towards a reductive essentialism that pitches the 'historical native' as a conveniently two-dimensional figure, his determination to unpack the enduring psychic load within the 'colonial scene' has contributed much to postcolonial theory and may have unexplored potentials in criminological settings and analysis.

In discussions about the relationship between race and crime, Rafan suggested there was a relatively uncomplicated and unproblematic racial hierarchy. When asked why, as he had suggested, black boys might be caught up in the criminal justice system more than Asian and white boys, Rafan's response was straightforward and simple:

> I don't know. Because they're black . . . It is what it is, to be honest.

His casual acceptance of the racialized order within the context of offending was stark and matter of fact. He did, however, appear to recognize the racial disparagement that lingered in the observation he had just made, and sought to qualify it with an immediate and corresponding reference to the Asian boys:

> It's just the way … it's probably the way they act or … See, even that is not right, saying 'the way they act'. Look at the way Asian boys act.

In Rafan's response, there is a restatement of conventional racial categorization that fixes criminality to black people, a categorization usually suppressed or avoided in public discourse on race and crime, but Rafan licenses his use of it by referring to his own minority and racialized status, implying without explicitly stating a correspondence that is felt but remains less than intelligible. Rafan seeks to temper his dismissive characterization of black people and to draw some of its poison by implicitly placing himself within the same racializing dynamic: 'look at the way Asian boys act'.

Rafan clearly felt marked by the violent incident he was involved in and his constant references throughout the interview to his parents being 'perfect' and having not done anything wrong seemed to be an attempt to disassociate his own wrongdoing from his family and wider relatives. He talked of how his dad was 'really well known … and really respected' underlining how Rafan's behaviour had ripple effects on his dad's reputation and business as he was a minicab driver who drew on his standing in the community for local custom. In this vein, Rafan seemed keen to convey how his family were 'normal' rather than in any way contaminated by the deviant status associated with criminal justice:

> Well you've got to remember something. A father's a grafter, he's outside. A mother's at home, mother brings up the kids. All of us, my brothers and sisters, everyone's fine. Everyone's completely perfect and happy with their life. No one's doing anything wrong, so it just says that my mum brought us up perfectly.

While the stigmatizing effects of criminal labelling are widely felt and generally recognized, there are imperial antecedents that may pull discretely and implicitly on Rafan's personal experience. The idea of being guilty by association was embedded in colonial constructions of criminality in India and were an important element in establishing the authority of white colonial power. Identifying collective pathological deviance was a formal project of government in Britain's Indian and African colonies where concepts of hereditary criminality were attributed in different ways. Colonial practices towards South Asians, for example, marked the criminal for such a reading through the use of penal tattoos (Anderson, 2004) and latent criminality was seen as an extended feature of whole groups of people. As Brown (2017, p. 188) observes, 'by the late 1940s … somewhere between three and 13 million Indians were subject to penal control' in India as a result of the criminal tribe's policy. This policy, enacted through Criminal Tribes Act 1924, established colonial ways of thinking about criminality, and 'seeing' and 'not seeing' Indian people's lives that are historically consequential. While conventional colonial narratives and critiques have tended to focus on the larger violence of events, such as those of the Thugee campaigns in the 1830s or the Jallianwala

Bagh massacre of 1919, the diffuse impact of the criminal tribe's policy is far less well known and underappreciated (Brown, 2017). Modes of surveillance towards whole tribes and the practice of making individuals guilty by association were established and played out in colonial India as was the practice of biometric identification through fingerprinting (Sengoopta, 2003). The fine threads and filaments of everyday lived experience that are woven into colonial institutions and processes are only now beginning to be gathered into the historical record and may inform better understandings of the way life is lived in the present. Identifying and situating these colonial traces in people's daily lives in Britain offers new and richer ways of making sense of their experiences of criminal justice and government.

These features of colonial rule in India on people's everyday lives and the image of a collective, 'tribal' criminality passed around and down hereditary lines of descent became a dominant organizing mentality of colonial India. And they did not stay in India. As in all features of coloniality, the experiences travelled to and fro between metropole and colony. Metaphorical and literal baggage assembled and shaped people's lives, influencing their sense of themselves, their place in society, and their prospects (Hall, 2002). Rafan might not be schooled in colonial history but the image he deploys of black criminality emerges from the colonial optics that regarded people of African descent as pathological criminals whose behaviours stemmed directly and inevitably from their biology (Anderson, 2004). Rafan's fatalistic comment that 'It is what it is' may be a throwaway remark but is also a succinct rephrasing of the 'born criminal' trope attached to black people by colonial powers.

In his interview, Rafan at various points either talked directly about or alluded to the exclusion he had been subject to, because of his involvement in crime and because of his ethnic background. Rafan also felt the force of being labelled and marked by his involvement in the fight and despite the court case not resulting in his prosecution he did not feel vindicated. The potential stain on his character remained a looming presence in his life. He felt as though his whole family were marked by the incident and was working hard to redeem himself in his family's and community's eyes. He had internalized a sense that he had let his family down and seemed to overcompensate by presenting an ideal version of himself to Alpa whenever he could. The stain of an enduring criminality had begun to shape his life from that moment on and haunted the decisions he went on to make. Our work is an attempt to pull these colonial threads, follow where they might lead, and explore how they may reach back into the past.

Warren: Transnational Whiteness Refusing to be Seen

Warren is an older white prisoner from Essex, a county on the north-eastern margins of London where he has worked for some years in the print industry. The interview was conducted in HMP Maidstone, Kent in 2007 by Rod Earle.

In his postcolonial studies of classical literature, Edward Said points to the 'dead silence' around race and identifies the imperial assumptions about the Atlantic slave trade to be found in, for example, Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* (Said, 1993). Even in everyday life, the recurring silences around race generate troubling omissions and gaps in life experience that correspond to its animating, but simultaneously denied,

apparently dead, presence. They combine to reproduce a sense of the unintelligibility of race, and its inevitable return. Using contemporary theorization of whiteness as an analytical frame, a symptomatic reading reveals more of the dynamics of race stirring below the surface of the interview. In it, Warren clings covertly to the classic racial understanding of whiteness as superiority. It is a defiant but fugitive whiteness that dare not speak its name out loud in the prison, the interview or, for that matter, much of the wider world. As the interview unfolds, this carefully hidden identification gradually leaks through on the back of his South African accent. This audible but un-transcribed data becomes central to the symptomatic reading that explores the implications of Warren's silences about race and whiteness. The interview provides an opportunity for exploring how a symptomatic reading may expose the work that must be done to make postcolonial critiques of whiteness matter more in criminological research.

'Don't get me white'? racial routes in and out of Zimbabwe, London, and Essex

In part of the interview, Warren tells Rod that he spent nineteen years of his life in Zimbabwe. Rod picks this up and mentions to Warren the slight hint of a South African accent in his voice. This leads Warren to tell Rod he speaks 'Dutch' and also 'some African languages', though he doesn't specify which ones. In fieldnotes, Rod recalls wondering if Warren really means he speaks Afrikaans, the South African derivative of Dutch that is such a powerful signifier of the imperial legacy of European struggles to own Africa and Africans. Perhaps Warren was concerned that it might disclose too much about himself too soon. He knows the research is concerned with race, and Afrikaans is a language uniquely and inescapably associated with apartheid, the paradigmatic pariah racial order of the postcolonial period. Re-listening to the interview some years later reveals how this unexpected linguistic disclosure seems to set off a tangential narrative that weaves uneasily through the rest of the interview. Rod notes how clumsily (perhaps leadingly) he asks Warren about his years in Zimbabwe, asking if he was 'raised there'. Warren responds defensively: 'Absolutely not, I spent 19 years of my adult life there, working', insisting he was born and brought up in Barking, Essex. He declares 'I'm an Englishman' and, as he does so, Rod hears again the South African/Afrikaans under-accent and Warren's alertness to its ambiguous, dislocating signals: 'I may not sound like one but believe me I am'. Warren willingly presents detailed vignettes from a 'colourful' life in London living with various women and of his travels around the world, but volunteers nothing at all of the substantial section of his life, the nineteen years spent in Zimbabwe that account for his accent and tension his assertion of being 'an Englishman'.

Unsettled by various aspects of the interview, Rod's post-interview fieldnotes record his impression of Warren's evasive need to talk in code and euphemism about race. It surfaces in inferences about the supposed drug-taking habits of his neighbours: 'I have no wish to associate with neighbours of that type' and that 'when they try to get to know you too intimately, that is a no-no as far as I am concerned'. He seems to deliberately avoid using any of the conventional ethnic terminology. With misgivings rising in the interview that Warren is dissembling around his feelings about race, Rod

presses the point and asks specifically and perhaps a little provocatively about whether any of the people and communities he is referring to are white. Warren appears to register Rod's provocation and responds by erasing it with the classic assertion of 'race-blindness', with all its characteristic cognitive dissonance:

> As far as black people are concerned … their colour of their skin is not in my vision, for want of a better expression. I accept everybody. I don't care what colour they are, I don't care what religion they are. As long as they don't do me any harm, I treat them with all the respect they deserve.

The interview transcripts read-as-text and as repeat-listening-recordings reinforce Rod's impression that Warren is saying almost the opposite of what he means. In the interview itself and over several listenings, Rod's suspicions grow that Warren, somewhat unusually for a white person, 'owns' rather than disowns a white racial identity, and that his orientation is actively rather than passively pro-racism. Rod mentions that racism is often a feature of life within communities and Warren responds, 'I am fully aware of the racial aspect, especially in London. I have always been aware and tried to convince people to see things my way, rather than their way. In the print business there has tended to be a lot of racial animosity, people belonging to the BNP and the likes'. He declares himself as 'non-racist' and speculates about the origins of racist feelings in an account that tumbles quickly into the logics of post-racial reverse as he appears to attribute the source of racist sentiments arising from within minority and immigrant communities: 'are they indoctrinated? Is it inbred in them or is it total resentment because they are in our country or whatever, I have no idea?'

In the interview, Rod pursues the Zimbabwe connection. Warren says he went there to work on a farm with his brother but states that he didn't like farming, that he has always seen himself as a printer, 'since I left school'. Rod asks if he worked as a printer in Zimbabwe and Warren says he did 'a bit', but pointedly doesn't expand. The gaps in his account seem to widen. He has a south African accent and has said he spent a third of his life in Zimbabwe but will tell nothing of it. The silences are symptomatic of an unspoken but almost self-evident racial story anchored in white English nationalism.

Accents of colonial hierarchy, evidence of whiteness

Because of their accents, white South Africans enjoy less of the conventional comforts associated with white invisibility and innocence. In a post-apartheid context, they tend towards a covert, fugitive whiteness as out of place in a post-apartheid Africa as they are in multi-cultural London or a multi-cultural prison (Phillips, 2012). The evasions and toxic ambiguity of Warren's account are consistent with those that emerge in research about white people in South Africa who consciously select, edit, and borrow their whiteness according to the circumstances under which it is exposed to question (Steyn, 2001). Inevitably, they are more aware of their whiteness and have become more self-conscious of its variable implications. If they leave South Africa for Europe, for example, they know that when they speak, their accent projects not just an 'interesting' national or regional identity but an ideology (Vestergaard, 2001). This is because the Afrikaans language

around which their accent forms became central to an explicit white nationalist project in which the construction of white supremacist identities would enable and justify the national boundaries of the whole continent of Africa.

In contrast to most white identities in which the construction and presence of whiteness is profoundly implicit, discretely positioning whiteness at the centre of racial discourse as the marker against which difference will be drawn, South African white identities are unavoidably aligned with apartheid's white supremacist ideology. They cannot so easily pass as innocent beneficiaries of whiteness (Robbins, 2017). Aware of the institutional whiteness of the apartheid regime signalled in their accent, white South Africans adopt a variety of biographical caveats. As with white people in the UK, they find some refuge in forms of 'secondary whiteness' (Alexander, 2017) that establish an ethnic whiteness at a suitable distance from the racial whiteness of apartheid and Empire. For Warren, however, it seems that there is no need for this kind of prevarication around ethnic difference because he remains loyal to the primary whiteness of 'his race' and its place in his imagined nation, England.

Race is thus part of a structuring set of relations making Warren the man he is and the world he moves through, from Zimbabwe to Barking. A symptomatic reading attends to silences, tension, absences, and contradictions around race and includes them in the analysis. Focusing more closely on the dynamics of race tangled in the criminological net in which Warren is caught and through which racism often slips unacknowledged can be revealing and rewarding for criminological analysis. By stressing the ideological valence of race in imperial and colonial projects, we are led to explore the ways in which it manifests in the personal experience of our respondents. Focusing on Warren's life as a white man situates race and coloniality as shaping his biography just as much as they might do Rafan's and Cairo's, even though their racialization is usually more open to critical scrutiny and criminological capture.

Conclusions: Colonial Violence, White Innocence, Criminal Questions

In outlining their experiences of crime, criminal justice, and injustice, Cairo, Rafan, and Warren lay bare some of the ongoing dimensions of coloniality. Their stories speak to traces and remnants of colonial practices that are not sequestered in the past but instead can take shape and matter in the world today. Racial hierarchies are writ large in their experiential realities, albeit sometimes subtly in the background and at other times their narratives reveal colonial presence in the foreground. Cairo, Rafan, and Warren's biographical connections to Jamaica, Bangladesh (and India), and Zimbabwe segue into the pervasive but sometimes elusive coloniality in the present. In so doing, they enable us to centralize race as an organizing logic of contemporary societies in ways that are more consistent with the analysis and approach of Saidiya Hartman (2008). Hartman's work aligns with Mbembe's to identify how the legacies of slavery and the ongoing colonial shape of the modern world flow through everyday life. Slavery, insists Hartman, established a racial calculus that fundamentally discounts and devalues black life. This deadly and death-dealing calculus remains active in modern society as the 'afterlife of slavery' and accounts for the persistence of

'skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration and impoverishment'. Paul Gilroy's (1987) seminal contributions to criminology are among the few that consistently and systematically centralize the legacies of colonialism and develop the implications of this 'afterlife of slavery'. This stands in stark contrast to the seeming erasure of coloniality and critical analysis of race at the centre of criminology. Gilroy's (2004) more recent work on postcolonial melancholia is less related to criminological questions than his earlier work but clearly signposts criminologists on the direction they must travel to redress this critical absence. Stoler's (2016, p. 342) argument for more work on the 'less perceptible effects of imperial interventions that settle into the social and material ecologies in which people dwell, and survive' is an argument we have tried to engage with in this chapter by deploying a particular methodological apparatus: symptomatic reading, collective analysis, and collaborative endeavour.

The tell-tale signs of the erasure of race and its consequences are not exclusive to criminology and in attending to them criminology might learn much from the way postcolonial studies identify absence and silence in the classical canon of literary studies (Morrison, 1993). For example, when the Covid-19 pandemic reanimated interest in Albert Camus's 1947 novel *The Plague*, a few alert critics highlighted the painful irony of neglecting the significance of Camus's erasure of colonized Arab experience (the novel is set in Algeria), at exactly the time that there was the same apparent indifference towards ethnic differentials in the impact of the Covid-19 'plague' in the UK (Rose, 2020; Earle, 2020). This tendency towards an exclusively white optic is not new, but often goes unmarked and unremarked. It reappeared, for instance, in a criminal justice context in 2021 when a judge offered an unusual bargain to a young white supremacist, neo-Nazi sympathizer he was sentencing for downloading an encyclopaedic collection of inflammatory racist material from the internet. The judge suspended a two-year custodial sentence, insisting instead that the man work through the judge's all-white recommended reading list: 'Have you read Dickens? Austen? Start with *Pride and Prejudice* and Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Think about Hardy. Think about Trollope' (Earle, 2021; Tickell, 2021).

Inattention to race is a persistent feature of white writing in criminology (Phillips et al., 2019; Parmar, 2016). Whether it is apathy, an unconscious or even a conscious turning away from race, it is made possible by a lack of accountability and empathy towards those people most consistently impacted by racial capitalism and the white supremacist dynamics that unfold so reliably through criminal justice systems. It is a silence that is sustained in the social experience of many white people and comprehensively theorized by Gloria Wekker (2016) as a form of white innocence. White innocence in academic life embraces what black philosopher Charles W. Mills (1997, pp. 188–189) described as a 'conceptual tokenization, where a black perspective is included but in a ghettoized way that makes no difference to the overall discursive logic of the discipline, or subsection of the discipline, in question: the framing assumptions, dominant narratives, prototypical scenarios'.

White innocence denies the salience of race in everyday life through the assumption that contemporary societies are post-racial meritocracies. Thinking of race with under-theorized sociology and without considering it as ideology seriously limits our understanding of the traction it can have in real life, the work it does for white people,

and the violence it does to those who are not white. Their whiteness is not an epidermal fact about the colour of their skin but refers to their position in a set of social relations established by colonialism. These positions offer access to, dividends from, and benefits accorded to the accumulated cultural capital that colonialism provides to a small minority of the global population.

Making connections: coloniality and criminology

In the UK, the effort to qualify British racism as 'less bad', 'less violent', 'less extreme' than the South African or the US variant has secured significant traction because it offers white people in the UK a familiar and comforting sense of elevation and erasure. It conveniently ignores Britain's pivotal role in securing, by the middle of the twentieth century, the global presumption that 'the white race' was superior to all others and that the British Empire was not only the prime example but actual proof of its qualities. As Stuart Hall warns, 'it is only as the different racisms are historically specified—in their difference—that they can be properly understood' (Hall, 1980, p. 337). What we have tried to do in this chapter is to establish the possibility of exploring more fully how historical specificities and differences make race and racism such a powerful force in the criminal justice system. Interviewing Cairo, Rafan, and Warren and seeking out the racial threads that are woven through the way they experience the world and talk about the world reveals the coloniality of the present. We do not seek to become ventriloquists projecting our voices through theirs, but we are interested in excavating connections between their experiences, our experiences, and the unavoidability of colonial history. James Baldwin's remark that 'people are trapped in history and history is trapped inside them' (Baldwin, 1958/1985) is a plea to use our knowledge of colonial history to free us from the traps its sets. Each of us, like Cairo, Rafan, and Warren, are differently positioned in those traps but attending carefully to them we might find the language and the narratives to decolonize at least some of the criminal questions they pose. To do so, we may need to abandon the old, white criminology and its habits of 'booming loudly with knowledge of the other' (Mykhalovsky, 1996), a noise that silences voices less often heard but with so much to say. We might follow Bhambra's (2014) lead in sociology and attend to connections that link the new black criminologies, Southern criminologies, and indigenous criminologies. These suggest that resistance and change often begin in new methodologies, art, and especially the art of words. In that spirit we end with a poet's angry warning:

> I am fed up with documentations of my grief … researchers claiming to record history when all they do is pick my wounds … This is my story, not yours. Long after you turn off your recorder I stay indoors and weep. Why don't people understand? …
>
> (Choman Hardi, 'The Angry Survivor', in *Considering the Women* (2015))

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