The Postcolonial Body in Queer Space and Time
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by

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PRESS
IN MEMORY OF DR. HOWARD JAMES FINE

1918-2005

WITH MUCH LOVE
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to John R. Leo at the University of Rhode Island for his enthusiastic support, constant intellectual inspiration, patience, and tireless work in providing suggestions, corrections, and comments on this work. Stephen M. Barber and Ryan S. Trimm, also in the English Department at the University of Rhode Island, served as extremely committed readers, and their ideas, in great part, helped to form the genesis of this project. My thanks are also offered to Alain-Philippe Durand and Clement White, both of the Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures Department at the University of Rhode Island, for their extensive comments and criticism, and for the great amount of time that they spent on seeing me successfully through this project. My sincere admiration and very deep thanks are also extended to the members of the English Department at the University of Rhode Island, and particularly to the Department Chair, Jean Walton.

I would also particularly like to thank the English Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston. My special gratitude goes to Judith Goleman, Director of Freshman English, and Robert Crossley, Department Chair, for their continued encouragement and patience, as well as to my many wonderfully talented and inspiring colleagues at UMass Boston. My students, at both UMass Boston and the University of Rhode Island have been, and will always be, my greatest source of inspiration and academic conversation. In addition, I would like to especially thank Dr. Andrea L. Yates, at the University of Rhode Island, for her endless support and friendship throughout this project.

Finally, of course, my thanks and love to my family.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE POSTCOLONIAL AS QUEER SPACE

I.

There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in with the world . . . Whether this was because I constantly misread my part or because of some deep flaw in my being I could not tell for most of my early life. Sometimes I was intransigent, and proud of it. At other times I seemed to myself to be nearly devoid of any character at all, timid, uncertain, without will. Yet the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place.1

Edward Said

Over the past year, two events occurred simultaneously that provided a catalyst for this work, which proposes to explore the ways in which the body of the postcolonial subject is seen in literature, responding to and resisting the effects of neo-colonization in London from the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s, specifically through the inhabitation of what I will describe as queer space and time. The first event concerned a panel that I chaired at the Northeast Modern Language Association annual conference in 2005 entitled “The Postcolonial Body,” while the second involved the teaching of Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels. I had begun planning the panel almost a year in advance, written a prospectus, pored over countless submissions, and selected papers. Throughout the process, I managed to ignore the nagging doubts in the back of my mind: what could I possibly mean by the terms “postcolonial” and “body”? The paper submissions I received underlined these concerns, as the literature that was discussed covered texts from areas which are conventionally considered “postcolonial” (India, Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia), but also addressed works from the United States, Europe, and Russia. While one proposal discussed Philip Roth, which I found to be quite a stretch, how could I reject a Native American author such as Sherman Alexie or the European Franz Kafka as somehow not embracing the “postcolonial”? Yet, if Kafka can be seen in this light because of

his minority status as a Jew in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, cannot Roth’s Jewishness in 20th Century America, and certainly Alexie, also be envisaged as products of colonization? Indeed, I found there to be a conflation of notions of colonization, globalization, racism, and economic inequality embedded in the interpretation of my peers’ understanding of what is “postcolonial,” and this tendency towards an amorphous understanding of the term seems to pervade the entire discipline. At the same time, the many proposals seemed to define a conception of the notion of the “body” which focused largely on issues of gender, race, and physical transformation. It occurred to me that these subjects all inherently deal with the external facets of the body; what can be seen, touched, or differentiated by the casual observer. Certainly, the “body” means more than this, and, most definitely, the ways in which the body may be influenced, constructed, or changed by its “postcolonial” status must affect not only the exterior, but the internal functions as well. The notion of “the body” opens up questions of what is contained in the physical presence of a human: if this “body” is, indeed, subject to a specific ontological experience based on history, geography, and political position, then certainly the parameters of the word “body” must be inclusive of both the interior and exterior, the visible and unseen, the mind, “soul,” and the mechanical structures of the organs themselves.

In order, then, to frame a discussion of the “postcolonial body,” it became evident to me that the two terms, “postcolonial” and “body,” must be defined in ways that make sense and offer parameters of the terms themselves. In the more than twenty-five years in which postcolonial studies has existed, the debate has raged over the use of this term which labels nations and people, referencing only the oppressions of the past, a constant look backwards. In 1995, the conversation concerning the naming of this field of critical and literary study was addressed in Bill Ashcroft’s collection, The Postcolonial Studies Reader. In this text, Stephen Slemon, in “The Scramble for Post-Colonialism,” argues that the term “postcolonial” “ends up referring the whole structure of colonialist discourse back to a single and monolithic originating intention within colonialism, the intention of colonialist power to possess the terrain of its Others.”2 The “monolithic origin” of colonialism, then, was seen as both overshadowing and defining the nations, texts, and the individual subjects within “postcolonialism.” Yet, Simon During also points out in his essay in this text, “Postmodernism or Post-colonialism Today,” that while “post-colonialism is regarded as the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an

identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images,“3 the notion itself defines these nations and groups solely as a product of the colonial experience. This definition, then, becomes a reductive way of repeating the Othering produced by colonization, while casting a wide net over all of those who have moved from one marginal status to another: the colonized merely become the previously colonized, the past always informs the present, the future remains mired in what has already been. Underscoring the many doubts that existed in the usage of the term “postcolonial,” in 1995, a half-way mark between the publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism in 1978, which marked the onset of Postcolonial Studies, and the present day, in their “General Introduction” to The Postcolonial Studies Reader, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin point out that

the increasingly unfocused use of the term ‘postcolonial’ over the last ten years to describe an astonishing variety of cultural, economic and political practices has meant that there is a danger of its losing its effective meaning altogether . . . the tendency to employ the term ‘postcolonial’ to refer to any kind of marginality at all runs the risk of denying its basis in the historic process of colonialism.4

Yet it is, in fact, the “basis in the historic process of colonialism” which allows for the term “postcolonial” to be applied to all peoples who have been colonized, whether through political, economic, racial, or gendering methods, and the fuzziness of the term “postcolonial” thus becomes based on the awkwardness of the concept of colonization itself. Are we not, in many ways, colonized by family to emerge as “independent” adults? Do the strictures of societal, educational, and political hegemonies of racism, sexism, and history produce us all as produced by our pasts? At the same time, the very fact that we are all “postcolonial,” in one way or the other, underlines the importance of the work being done in this area, and emphasizes that the “postcolonial” is, indeed, a descriptor of a specific human experience, a time and a place inhabited by bodies that function in a mode of “postcoloniality.” Perhaps those who submitted proposals for my “Postcolonial Body” panel revealed that the discomfort with the term is based on the limiting boundaries of conventional geography and notions of nations and politics which have shaped postcolonial studies to date. I will argue that the postcolonial is, indeed, a space, but one that I will argue inhabits a “queer,” nonnormative geography and temporality, constructed by the history of colonization, the process of Othering, and the pressures and realities

of the diaspora and the emerging global community. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains, “recent work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example.”

“Spinning” the term away from sexuality allows this movement into the realm of the “queerness” of what we term the “postcolonial” that helps to define the term, and to read the literatures that emerged from the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s, which introduce not merely the “postcolonial,” but the “queer” subject as well. This move into a “queer” space is articulated in the works of Hanif Kureishi in this time period, as well as the poetry of Arthur Nortje, and Tayeb Salih’s novel, *Season of Migration to the North*. Perhaps, indeed, the “postcolonial” is not best defined by the history of the nation from which the individual emerges, but, instead, by the non-normative modes of living which are produced and enacted by that individual as a response to normative temporalizations and spatializations of the cultures they inform.

Indeed, the idea that the genesis of the postcolonial subject has moved from a predetermined, historically fixed locus to a wider metropolitan arena is discussed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Death of a Discipline*. For her, “metropolitan multiculturalism [is] the latter phase of dominant postcolonialism,” emphasizing the ways in which the concept of the postcolonial has relocated itself within diasporas, disrupting the linkage of nation and individual, and, perhaps, isolating the postcolonial subject within the cultural vastness of the metropole. Spivak explains that “Postcolonialism remained caught in mere nationalism over against colonialism. Today it is planetarity that we are called to imagine—to displace the historical alibi, again and again.”

Her notion of the planetary does not inscribe the “continental, global or worldly . . .” but rather defines “an undivided ‘natural’ space rather than a differentiated political space . . . .” Spivak’s imagined space of the planetary elides geographical and political boundaries, and therefore replicates, in many ways, the wanderings of the diasporic and the disruption of nationalistic and political alliances, and locates the postcolonial subject in a liquid space of slippage. When Spivak contends that “the planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system . . . ,” she aligns the postcolonial to the models of queer, non-normative space which I will discuss below. Spivak views postcoloniality as now embracing

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7 Ibid., 81.
8 Ibid., 72.
9 Ibid.
questions of class and race, where “Postcoloniality, the relationship between ‘the educated West African’—the Black European—and the ‘primitive’ has con-
tinued in a class apartheid,” 10 and the emphasis of postcolonial studies in the
1980s and 1990s on nation and history as the source for defining the postcolo-
nial, has evaporated into the broader discussion of the inequities of the diasporic
in the metropole. Spivak concludes that “The old postcolonial model . . . will
not serve now as the master model for transnational to global cultural studies on
the way to planetarity.”11

Similarly, Benita Parry, in Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique,
states that “The problem for [postcolonial] critical work . . . presents itself not as
one of aligning reconciliation with remembrance, but rather of joining remem-
brance of the past with a critique of the contemporary condition.” 12 The “con-
temporary condition” of the postcolonial, for Parry, is problematized by the fact
that “To speak . . . of metropolis and colony as inhabiting the same in-between,
interstitial ground ignores that this territory was differentially occupied, and that
it was contested space, being the site of coercion and resistance.” 13 Cosmopoli-
tan space is contested on entirely different ground, and it is certainly here that
Spivak’s concerns with class and race come into play. Parry also emphasizes
the ways in which the individual itself moves from a subject who is seen as con-
structed within the colonial/postcolonial binary, to one where “the formation of
its differentiated and incommensurable subjectivities is the effect of many de-
terminants, numerous interpellations, and various social practices.” 14 Parry ar-

gues strongly against “undifferentiated identity categories” 15 in postcolonial
theory that reduce subjectivities into simplified, oppressed masses. She says that
“A postcolonial rewriting of past contestation, dependent as it is on a notion of a
multiply located native whose positions are provisional . . . does not restore the
foundational, fixed and autonomous individual.” 16 What I will argue here is that
as the notion of the postcolonial itself has moved from being defined by the
spaces of nationalities, so the postcolonial subject is seen as performing a
metamorphosis from a member of the nation, to an autonomous agent in the
metropole. This move places particular emphasis on the corporeality of this
subject, where the body becomes the central locus that, although displaced from

10 Ibid., 98-99.
11 Ibid., 85.
193.
13 Ibid., 69.
14 Ibid., 37-38.
15 Ibid., 37.
16 Ibid., 38.
nation and the continuous haunting of colonization, still “[remains] unreconciled
to the past and unconsolled by the present.” ¹⁷

These arguments concerning both the liquid quality of postcolonial space
that Spivak suggests, and the agency of the postcolonial subject, became clear to
me when the timing of the “Postcolonial Body” panel coincided with the publi-
cation of Judith Halberstam’s In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies,
Subcultural Lives. In her opening chapter, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern
Geographies,” Halberstam explains that “If we try to think about queerness as
an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric
economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity . . . .” ¹⁸ If we do,
indeed, “detach queerness from sexual identity,” we can begin to imagine those
spaces which function in non-normative time patterns and across spaces which
escape conventional definition, and are certainly inhabited by diasporic peoples
and nations emerging from colonial rule. Halberstam emphasizes that “Queer
subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to
believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of
those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, repro-
duction, and death.” ¹⁹ “Queer time,” then, is removed from the normative time-
line which is “upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality,” ²⁰ and
becomes a temporality where notions of past, present, and future are “dimin-
ished,” in Halberstam’s term, conflated, confused, or entirely erased. Those
who inhabit queer time upset or disengage themselves from the normative pro-
gression of a life which is lived in order to fulfill the “logics of labor and pro-
duction . . . [and] the logic of capital accumulation.” ²¹ If the notion of reproduc-
tion is removed from the timeline of life, if the present no longer pivots around
the past and future, then the subject lives in “queer time,” both freed and ex-
cluded from normative societal expectations. This state, I will argue, is re-
flected in the disrupted and queer time lived by the diasporic in London in the
late 20th century, as they are unleashed from the normative alliances of nation-
hood, and can be seen specifically in the texts I will address in the later chapters.

Halberstam notes that the “queer subject” can be produced “deliberately,
accidentally, or of necessity,” ²² and the postcolonial, in many ways, is the result
of all three modes. The ways in which Halberstam links queer time necessarily
with queer space emphasizes that queer time must be lived within queer space,

¹⁷ Ibid., 193.
¹⁸ Judith Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives
¹⁹ Ibid., 2.
²⁰ Ibid., 4.
²¹ Ibid., 10.
²² Ibid.
the “physical, metaphysical, and economic [space] that others have abandoned,”
therefore conflating spatialities and temporalities. For instance, without the central notion of family fueling the timeline of life, spaces reserved for family recreation, family eating, or child care become non-existent, which is clearly seen in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Most of all, Halberstam frames the concept of the local as queer space, saying that “the ‘local’ for post-modern geographers [is] the debased term in the binary [with] their focus on the global . . . and even the universal is opposed to the local with its associations with the concrete, the specific, the narrow . . . and even the bodily.”

Certainly, the local, as seen in the postcolonial nation, which is opposed to both the global and the “mother” nation of England, offers such a “debased” space, as depicted in Nortje’s South Africa and Salih’s Sudanese village. And the body, itself, then, becomes defined as the queerest space of all, working against the normative temporalities of the global, as the local sphere is also asked to shift to the normality of global time and space. With the postcolonial emphasis on the connection between nation and identity, the act of the naming of the “postcolonial” re-emphasizes the concept of the local as set against the hegemonies of the global, the queer space of the nation debased against the social and economic normality of the universal. As Halberstam notes, “the histories of racialized peoples have been histories of immigration, diaspora, and forced migration,” where the movement between local spaces creates new, queer spaces, never really “here” and certainly no longer “there.” For London, which serves as the central geographic point for Nortje, Kureishi, and Salih, the locus of the city becomes the global in many ways, as the cosmopolitan center engenders a multitude of localities, further conflating and confusing any sense of a normative definition of the global and the local, and creating a queered geography within itself.

The “postcolonial,” then, can be seen as inhabiting queer space and time: the very emphasis on the lands which have been subjected to imperialistic rule constructs a necessary binary of Us/Other, where the weight of history is deemed to define the present and the future, as well as the bodies and individualities of those who inhabit this space. The notion of a normative timeline is disrupted by both the increasing weight of the past, and the “diminishing future [which] creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now.”

Thoughts of a return to the homeland, as well as a hope for inclusion in the adopted country, are always infusing and disengaging concrete future plans. In addition, the sheer vastness of the space which is named “postcolonial” defies any form of

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 11.
25 Ibid., 8.
26 Ibid., 2.
geographic normalcy: in the intervening twenty years of postcolonial theory, the term has come to cover virtually the entire globe, including more of the areas that had previously not viewed themselves as “postcolonial,” and usually excluding the United States, England, and Western Europe. While the term “postcolonial” thus embraces the geography which is defined as not Euro-American, “postcolonial” also evolves into a moniker for the spaces and bodies that are “queer” to the hegemonic timelines and spaces of the West, and that are “queered” by the West in a continued process of Othering and examination, opposing the local with the global and the Westernized. Halberstam suggests that the concept of queerness “has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space.”

The rendering of the “postcolonial” as queer allows for ways in which literatures, specifically those of Kureishi, Nortje, and Salih, can be seen to be revealing narratives which must necessarily work against the concepts of space and time that have been defined by the normative values of the West.

Terming the postcolonial as “queer space” then allows for “new ways of understanding the nonnormative logics and organizations of community . . . sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.”

Certainly, early postcolonial theory set up the queerness of postcolonial space, particularly in conversations concerning the diaspora from South Asia and Africa. In 1993, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy presents a theory of the diaspora which centers on the idea of the “Black Atlantic,” where the histories of all who were historically involved in the crossings and recrossings of slaves, exiles, and refugees become intertwined and embedded within each other. The history of these crossings, lodged in the memories of the diaspora, creates an “intercultural and transnational formation” that Gilroy links to the development of modernity and to the fact that “to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness,” based on the confluence of spatial memories and linkage, which create the queer space and time that the postcolonial diasporic must negotiate. This “double consciousness,” which is sustained in both the memory of the homeland and the acquisition of new culture and language in the host country, is reassembled into a myriad of consciousnesses and locations that the postcolonial subject must acknowledge. “Double consciousness” becomes queer consciousness, as concepts of normative time and space disappear in multiple locations and uncertain futures.

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27 Ibid., 2.
28 Ibid., 6.
30 Ibid., 1.
In 1997, Ian Baucom’s “Charting the Black Atlantic” went beyond the idea of Gilroy’s “double consciousness” to specifically spatialize and temporalize the queerness of diasporic geography. Baucom’s purpose is to ultimately determine how the spaces of postcoloniality are “inhabited and experienced,” by examining the “waters” that connect the lands of home and diaspora. Linking a photograph by Sutupa Biswas, an excerpt from Joseph Conrad’s *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, a passage from Eduord Glissant, and a poem by Derek Walcott, Baucom adopts Glissant’s term, “the lesson of the ‘transversal’”\(^{31}\) to explain the ways in which the buried history of the crossings of the Atlantic connect the postcolonial with the colonial. This history creates “a liquid territory parted by the keels of fishing pirogues, tourist liners, merchant vessels and slavers which, in cross-hatching the Caribbean, connect those watery deeps to the primitivizing economies of the American leisure industry.”\(^{32}\) This territory represents a queer geography in its inclusion of land and sea, past and present, oppressors and oppressed.

Baucom’s essay focuses on a metaphoric image of the postcolonial, diasporic body, which is the body I will discuss here to argue the notion of the postcolonial subject as an inhabitant of queer space and time. Referencing Biswas’ photographs from her exhibition entitled “Synapse” and her later work “White Noise,” Baucom compares the system of routes and lines beneath the Black Atlantic to the nerve cells and the neurological synapses of the brain. Following the work of the biologist, Humberto Maturana, Baucom notes that the cell, which forms the synapse, “exhibits a ‘structural determinism’”\(^{33}\) that performs “regulated, auto-referential, and sovereign acts of self-description.”\(^{34}\) The contradiction of this function lies in the fact that “each unity is simultaneously ‘structurally coupled’ to its environment.”\(^{35}\) In this, Baucom draws the analogy that the human body, like the cell, “can be seen as a unity autonomously within, but coupled to, a surrounding environment.”\(^{36}\) He points out that, for those in the diaspora, their autonomy as individuals is similarly tied to the historical environment of the many ocean crossings of slaves and exiles. The central locality of individual corporeality thus becomes intrinsically linked to the locality of the homeland, both of which are queered in their opposition to and exclusion from the global, and from those who do not share in this history.

Baucom then discusses a “cartography,” or mapping, of these intertwined synaptic connections as a trope for the routes and waterways of the diaspora. Comparing the ways in which “the biologist sketches a map of our organic ge-

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{34}\) Ibid.
\(^{35}\) Ibid.
he notes that cells in the synapses of the brain, like movements in
the diaspora, are “relentlessly performative [and] its performances always occur
with reference to the peculiar ontogenetic histories of the unities and environ-
ments it couples.” In utilizing the nervous system as a metaphor for the con-
nections of diasporic subjects, he “[identifies] the Atlantic as the nervous system
of empire.” This construction of the diaspora as a nervous system moves not
only through space, but through time as well, connecting the past, present, and
future to form “subjects not only of a then and a now but of a yet-to-be.” The
movements of a non-normative time, space, and history are seen as explicitly
imprinted upon these postcolonial bodies, and they align themselves with the
movement from place and time in the diaspora, suggesting ways in which the
diasporic body is subject to both a temporal and spatial dislocation, moving
within queer space and time.

Baucom is careful to point out that his metaphoric use of the synaptic sys-
tem of the brain as a metaphor for the movement and connection of bodies in the
diaspora differs from Deleuze’s “rhizomatic dislocation of the subject, a self
which manifests itself not as an essence but as a meandering.” Baucom points
out that “the rhizome has neither a history nor an environment. The synapse has
both.” In addition, he says that “if we conceive of culture as a rhizomatic as-
semblage, then we must construct a philosophy of culture which has no use for
memory. . . . If, instead our cartographies of culture are synaptic, then we must
read our coupling routes not only as lines of connection but as the tracework of
continuing and inherited histories.” The synaptic structure of the brain thus
becomes a trope for the diaspora, and each cell is used as a metaphor for indi-
vidual diasporic bodies, which are connected and inter-related within the dias-
pora and to the grounding of a common, shared past, mediated into a complex
cultural memory.

The continued metaphor of the diaspora as a synaptic system and the link-
age to bodily systems implies that the diaspora is thus imbricated in some larger
body, which exists at the core of its ability to think and function, yet the neural
system remains separate from all of the other organs or activities which the body
might experience. The cells, which represent each individual diasporic body, thus
become not only the minute parts which make this synaptic system run, but are also fully involved in the maintenance of the overall synaptic function. The

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36 Ibid., 7.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 3.
40 Ibid., 4.
41 Ibid., 8.
42 Ibid.
cell’s function is, indeed, to work for the greater good of the larger system; they are not “discrete organic unities”\(^{43}\) in their performance. I will argue, therefore, that, in fact, it is the model of Deleuze’s rhizome that more accurately describes the queer time and space of the postcolonial subject: a “meandering” and a “dislocation,” rather than a tightly-wound system. The synaptic metaphor that Baucom develops is one that is fraught with an over-coding of the diasporic subject as a worker linked to other workers, their histories connected, involved in the project of making the synapse function, and, in that, in supporting the structure and activities of the larger body as a whole in which they are embedded. The metaphor is strongly reminiscent of the structures of coloniality, and places the diasporic body once again within a network of subjugation and individual anonymity. Maintaining a shared history of colonial repression, as Baucom’s synaptic metaphor suggests in an attempt to connect the members of the diaspora in a network bound by history, results in suggesting yet another metaphoric colonizing of the diasporic individual and a placement of them in a queer space, set apart from the “normal” spaces which range free from history and remain autonomous from the synaptic linkage to the group as a whole. In this, Baucom does, in fact, present a model for the queer space and time of the postcolonial, but, perhaps, in accepting the trope of the nervous system, he has then relocated this queer space and time in yet another colonialist structure: the synapse is a self-defined space, as are the contested geographies of colonized nations; I will argue that the queer spatialities which are discussed in this project necessarily move within, around, and beyond finite collectives of space.

Yet Baucom inadvertently recognizes this model of the queerness of postcolonial time and space. While initially presenting the concept of a “queer” double-time and consciousness, and perhaps incorrectly connecting this to a systematic network, he also presents in this essay a haunting metaphor for postcolonial space. It is from Walcott’s poem, “The Sea is History,” and Glissant’s discussion of “submarine roots”\(^{44}\) that Baucom develops his other metaphor of the “submarine space”\(^{45}\) that the postcolonial body figuratively occupies as it traverses the waters of the diaspora, connecting back-and-forth between homeland and diasporic space, and between then and now, in a reconstruction of the movements of Empire, post-imperialism, and the diaspora. Referring to Conrad’s depiction of a dead black man, thrown into the Atlantic, who “bobbed up upon the surface, compelling attention,”\(^{46}\) Baucom sees “the mocking and untimely resurfacing of that black subject which England has yet to submerge.”\(^{47}\)

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Ibid.
\(^{47}\) Ibid.
The dead body of James Wait in Conrad’s text becomes a trope for all of the black bodies that have crossed the seas in slave ships and the diaspora. As Baucom develops the idea of the “postcolonial submarine,” it is the connection with dead bodies that grounds his metaphor. While England may be unable to “submerge” the bodies of those in the diaspora, they are likened to a corpse that stays on the surface only briefly before sinking forever. In using this comparison, the postcolonial submarine, crossing the underwater spaces, becomes a ship that views dead bodies as it traverses the waters, and the diasporic body becomes continuously linked to the dead bodies of slaves. The passage that Baucom quotes from Glissant supports this, as Glissant remarks “‘to my mind this expression [the submarine] can only evoke all those Africans weighed down with ball and chain and thrown overboard.’” Baucom notes that Glissant “discovers an unrepressable object of dread at the heart of this tidal wandering, [yet] he encounters a liberating principle of briny metamorphosis,” explaining that “he returns the time of drowning to our present time not as that which terrifies or outrages but as that which continuously transforms the contemporary.”

This transformation does not in any way elide the metaphoric comparison of the bodies of the diaspora with the drowned bodies of slaves, but, rather, “asks that in joining ourselves to the no-longer forgotten we refuse to fetishize an alternate past and instead cultivate a vulnerability to the mutating ebb-tides of submarine memory.” The submarine, symbolically filled with the bodies of the diaspora as they move beneath the waters towards departures and arrivals, is asked to travel the queered paths of the dead and drowned bodies, always remembering this history and imprinting it upon their bodies as a basis for constructing identity in exile. In suggesting this, the postcolonial submarine is forever referent to Empire and the slave trade, in a “dis-synchronicity” of time where “our senses of a ‘now,’ and a ‘then,’ and a ‘not-yet’ deliriously trade places with one another . . . with a mixture of sorrow and delight.” Halberstam elaborates her sense of this mixture, saying that “‘Queer space’ refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.” Baucom’s suggestion that those in the diaspora refuse the subjectifying constructions of host countries by maintaining a constant metaphoric linkage to the dead bodies of the past, defines the inhabitation of the queer space that defines the diasporics’ conditions in England.

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 4.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 3.
53 Halberstam, 6.
This queerness of the linkage to the past in which the diasporic moves is further underlined as Baucom discusses John Ruskin’s analysis of the Turner painting, *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying*, which is referenced in Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*. Ruskin explains that in paintings “enjoined to devote ourselves alternately to the surface and the reflected ‘above,’ our eyes are forbidden permission to peer beneath the water, or told that there is no beneath, that what is visible below the surface is merely an inverse image of that which floats above.”54 The postcolonial submarine, then, becomes not only the machine that transports the diaspora through the waters filled with corpses, but also remains invisible to those who view it from above. Diasporic bodies travel, invisible, encased within the submarine, in the seas of the dead. This haunting metaphor suggests that the body moves into and through the diaspora as an unseen object, and that it emerges only as “a bobbing figure” when it reaches the host country. It is only at this point that the diasporic body becomes visible to the host nation. The body arrives with a queered identity which has been produced by its association and knowledge of the corpses among which it has traveled, and the “bobbing figure” must necessarily inhabit a queer space and time, unlike that lived by English nationals. Baucom continues his analogy by suggesting, after analyzing a passage from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, that England itself can be “[read] . . . as a waterway . . . identifying England’s waters as a liquid cemetery.”55 If, indeed, Britain is also figuratively defined as a “liquid cemetery,” then those who join diasporic communities in England are moving through one submerged land of dead bodies to another. The waters of the Black Atlantic become the imperial waters, and the postcolonial subject is, in fact, confronting not only the bodies of dead slaves, but the corpses of empire as well. The queer, non-normative submarine space that Baucom describes is, in fact, a place of re-enactment of coloniality, where the bodies of the colonizers and the bodies of the colonized once more drift together in the subjectifying formation of identities, and it is in this encounter that the postcolonial body offers up a specific corporeal resistance to the neo-colonizing processes of culture.

These dead bodies, then, do not afford a visual or metamorphic refusal of the subjugated identities that the diasporic body encounters in the host country, but, instead, confirm and support a continuation of the colonized/colonizer binary, forcing the diasporic to inhabit both queer space and time. Yet I will argue that in the very construction of the queer space which is the postcolonial, there is an inherent resistance to and refusal of the hegemonies of neo-colonization by the diasporic in England. Paul Gilroy, in *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, explains that

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55 Ibid., 11.
diaspora identification exists outside of and sometimes in opposition to the political forms and codes of modern citizenship. At one end of the communicative circuit this is to be accomplished by the assimilation of those who are out of place. At the other, a similar outcome is realized through the prospect of their return to a place of origin.\textsuperscript{56}

Both alternatives result in an identity that is determined by the discomfort of exile, and both ends of this spectrum rely on the constant revisiting of the colonial project, as Baucom’s metaphors suggest. Yet, as we will see with both the poet Arthur Nortje and in Salih’s \textit{Season of Migration to the North}, overcoming the complexities of identity construction for the postcolonial diasporic is often not as clear cut as choosing between either assimilation or return to the homeland. The “codes of modern citizenship” are not easily absorbed by either Nortje or Mustafa Sa’eed while in England, as the avenue towards assimilation is blocked by racialization.

Gilroy explains that “Diaspora yearning and ambivalence are transformed into a simple unambiguous exile once the possibility of easy reconciliation with either the place of sojourn or the place of origin exists,”\textsuperscript{57} but notes that that ambivalence is not always so easily reconciled. For Mustafa and Nortje, there are, as Baucom suggests, those “acts of liquid disobedience”\textsuperscript{58} that subvert the synapses that the postcolonial submarine traverses, and resist or refuse to reconcile with either the “place of sojourn or the place of origin.”\textsuperscript{59} When reconciliation is impossible, the body of the diasporic is often the site where resistance to the disciplining structures of the host country is displayed: for Arthur Nortje, this takes place through bulimia and the abuse of drugs; for Mustafa, it is through his performance of masochism. Halberstam explains that “the queer ‘way of life’ will encompass subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance . . . and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these willfully eccentric modes of being,”\textsuperscript{60} and it is within the “willfully eccentric” practices that are depicted in postcolonial literature that the embodiment of queer space and time can best be seen.

As Brian Axel points out, “the diaspora embodies a particular time that manifests itself not only in terms of a “memory” but also in the physical and

\textsuperscript{56} Paul Gilroy, \textit{Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line} (Cambridge: Belknap, 2001), 124.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Baucom, “Black Atlantic,” 14.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Halberstam, 1.
visible presence of the body.” 61 When the body refuses the subjectifications of
the state, the diasporic does not reconcile to either homeland or host country, but
answers only to itself, “changing the relationship between opposition and au-
thority” and undermining the “hegemonic constructions of time and space . . .” 62
Indeed, in examining the first wave of literatures produced by diasporics in En-
gland between the mid-1960s and 1990, I will show that, by understanding the
postcolonial as queer space, the refusals of neo-colonizing subjectification can
be seen as what Halberstam, following Pile, delineates as “‘geographies of resis-
tance,’” that “are not symmetrical to the authority they oppose . . . [as] queers
use space and time in ways that challenge conventional logics of development,
maturity, adulthood, and responsibility.” 63 In the works of Arthur Nortje, Hanif
Kureishi and Tayeb Salih, what is revealed in the narratives of the diasporic in
England is “A queer history of subcultures, armed with a queer sense of tempo-
rality, tracks the activity of community building, traces the contours of collectiv-
ity, and follows the eccentric careers of those pioneers who fall outside the neat
models of narrative history . . .” 64 Focusing on the ways in which this first wave
of postcolonial literatures reveals nonnormative spatialities and temporalities,
reveals the ways in which “those pioneers who fall outside the neat models of
narrative history” also dissolve and disrupt the constraints of colonial or national
history in order to construct and situate the present.

II.

The human body can be seen as a unity autonomously within, but coupled to, a
surrounding environment, or it may be understood as the environment enclosing
a multitude of discrete organic unities.

Ian Baucom 65

But what of the body itself? If Baucom traces the ways in which postcolo-
niality functions within the diaspora, in the “double consciousness” of queer
space and time, and the ways in which this postcoloniality performs corporeally,
it still remains to define the notion of the “body.” One model for the postcoloni-
rial body can be traced from the emergence of the idea of the examined body,

62 Halberstam, 6.
63 Ibid., 13.
64 Ibid., 187.
which Foucault traces to the middle of the 18th Century, through 19th Century concepts of the racialized body, and into postcolonial theorist’s, specifically Homi Bhabha’s, notion of the mimicking body. In this, the second event, mentioned above, which foregrounds this work, was my teaching experience of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, a text that cannot be construed as “postcolonial,” but which, it occurred to me, definitely outlines notions of the body itself as “queer space.” In following the construction of Gulliver’s corporeality, an examination of Anne McClintock’s discussion of the imperial constructs of the body as a site of racial attention and “cleansing” will then be seen as a model for the ways in which Sir Richard Burton reverses and disrupts this notion of commodification of the body, in his cross-dressing as “native.” In Burton’s use of disguise, then, emerges a parallel to the colonial construct of Bhabha’s “mimic man,” Kristeva’s notion of the “uncanny” which is embodied in this, and, ultimately, to the queer space of the body itself.

Written in 1735, *Gulliver’s Travels* depicts the shipwrecked English surgeon, Lemuel Gulliver, awakening in a very foreign land. His time among the Lilliputians, particularly, is remarkable in many ways, not the least of which are the many references that Gulliver makes to the functions and actions of his physical body. Like the diasporic postcolonial subject in England, Gulliver is away from home, and in a land that he neither understands nor can control, and is seen to revert to the inspection of the corporeal, utilizing and examining the ways in which his body works to define who he is to the Lilliputians, to maintain a sense of self throughout his journeys, and, ultimately, to seek liberation from and power over the strange cultures in which he finds himself. As I taught and discussed this text with my students, I found that Swift presented a model for a body that is located in queer space and time, and that also presented a direct link to Michel Foucault’s theories of the functioning of power, their applications to the colonial and postcolonial experience, and the ways in which this body might be shown to practice corporeal resistance to a larger society through its organic functions.

Swift is eager to discuss Gulliver’s body in ways that were usually not explored in British Literature. As *Gulliver’s Travels* itself embeds the larger metaphor of the English subject arriving in colonies that represent similar “unknown” and “savage” cultures, in many ways, Gulliver’s body becomes the English national body as it entangles itself with the mysteries, fears, and lack of control in the worlds that it colonizes, and that exist in the space outside of nationally defined corporeality. In addition, Gulliver’s fascination and fixation with the bodies of those he encounters foreshadows the attention that the English would focus on the corporeality of their colonized subjects as Imperialism reached its peak in the 19th century. For Gulliver, his anthropological approach to the Lilliputians becomes enmeshed with the examination of his own body and
his attention to its activities. Interestingly, Swift also depicts Gulliver as captive and instrument of anthropological inquiry; in this, Gulliver adopts the role of “colonized,” minority citizen in the lands to which he travels. As Gulliver adapts to imprisonment and inspection, Swift depicts a body that is centered on its digestive and excretive needs as a source of “normality” and as a touchstone with reality. Gulliver, as a captive, subjugated, and examined self, responds with a strict consciousness of the ways in which his body works and the corporeal needs which must be met. The model of the body which *Gulliver’s Travels* projects is one of the body examined, both from those who have colonized and “captured” it, and, in response, by the individual himself.

On his first day in Lilliput, Gulliver’s narrative focuses on “the Demands of Nature so strong upon me, that I could not forbear showing my Impatience,”66 as he pantomimes his need for food and drink. More interestingly, Gulliver relates the logistics and urgency of the process of “making Water; which I very plentifully did, to the great Astonishment of the People,” describing “the Torrent which fell with such Noise and Violence from me.”67 Swift, through Gulliver, opens up a discussion of the functions of the body which bypassed accepted mid-eighteenth century conventions concerning the polite, discursive limits of what could be addressed in literature and in society. In Gulliver’s methodical rendering of his travels, the needs of his body override his very sense of “civilization,” a notion that he attempts to utilize to differentiate himself from the strange cultures he encounters. In this, Gulliver inhabits a queer space: he both replicates the desire of the colonizer to differentiate his “civilization” against the “primitive” world of the colonized, and also throws off the notions of “civilization” in order to survive and negotiate the alien culture in which he has found himself. While teaching this text, and simultaneously reading proposals and preparing for the “Postcolonial Body” panel, I was struck by the ways in which Gulliver’s situation was analogous to the queer space and time inhabited in the diasporic experience, and even more impressed with the ways in which his corporeality became the touchstone for his identity and his actions while in queer space, a move which I will argue is replicated in the postcolonial literature of the 1960s-1980s, particularly in the poetry of Arthur Nortje.

Gulliver’s immersion in the corporeal is perhaps seen most clearly in two episodes from “The Voyage to Lilliput”: first, in Gulliver’s extensive description of defecation, and secondly, when he saves the lives of the royal family by urinating on their burning castle. In the first instance, Gulliver provides a minute detailing of the tension between his corporeal needs and the expectations of the society in which his reader is embedded:

67 Ibid., 9.
I had been for some Hours extremely pressed by the Necessities of Nature, which was no Wonder, it being almost two Days since I had last disburthened myself. I was under great Difficulties between Urgency and Shame. The best Expedient I could think on was to creep into my House . . . and shutting the Gate after me, I went as far as the Length of my Chain would suffer; and discharged my Body of that uneasy Load. But this was the only Time I was ever guilty of so uncleanly an Action . . . From this Time my constant practice was, as soon as I rose, to perform the business in the open Air, at the full Extent of my Chain; and due Care was taken every Morning before Company came, that the offensive Matter should be carried off in Wheel-barrows, by two Servants appointed for that purpose. I would not have dwelt so long upon a Circumstance . . . if I had not thought it necessary to justify my Character in Point of Cleanliness to the World . . . .

While Gulliver’s account reflects the scrupulousness of detail that he has promised to deliver to the reader, his motives in “[justifying] my character” clearly show the ways in which Gulliver equates the control and discipline of bodily functions in a time of duress with the picture of “character,” and particularly English character, that he hopes to paint. Time and again, throughout Gulliver’s Travels, Gulliver assures us that his is the voice of “civilization.” In the outlining of his defecatory strategies, the qualities of civilization, of being “clean,” and of being British, are then marked as not only visible through the productions of the body, but are determined by the ways in which those productions are managed. This management of the functions of the body would be replicated in British colonialism’s efforts to “clean” and “whiten” the bodies of the colonized, a move that again centered the body as a primary site of identity formation.

In the second instance, the palace fire, caused by “the Carelessness of a Maid of Honor, who fell asleep while she was reading a Romance,” is ended by Gulliver’s “Urine; which I voided in such a Quantity, and applied so well to the proper Places, that in three Minutes the Fire was wholly extinguished.” Gulliver prides himself on having “done a very eminent Piece of Service,” but is also well aware that “it is Capital in any person, of what Quality soever, to make water within the Precincts of the Palace.” Gulliver realizes that his seemingly heroic action might also be construed as an act of treason, and he awaits the judgment of the King, commenting that “the Empress conceiving the greatest Abhorrence of what I had done, removed to the most distant Side of the
Court, firmly resolved that those Buildings should never be repaired for her Use... Yet there is no regret voiced here; Gulliver does, indeed seem to move between tones of anger, disbelief, and smug satisfaction as he recounts what he perceives as a necessary action. This action, the utilization of his urine to combat the Lilliputian fire, closely parallels to Gulliver’s own discursive treatment of the necessities of his bodily functions: each are immediate and reflexive responses, and each action promotes the depiction of a body that delineates, challenges, and defines its own cultural position and production, particularly in relation to the Lilliputians. It is, in the end, these very acts of the body which cause Gulliver to be dismissed from favor among the Lilliputians, and which Gulliver deems necessary in his position in the queer space and time of Lilliput.

As a surgeon, Gulliver’s interest in his and others’ bodies is understood; it is perhaps essential that Swift should have created Gulliver as a doctor. The doctor is, of course, he who studies, examines, and repairs the body. In *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, Michel Foucault points out that it is exactly at the time when Swift wrote *Gulliver’s Travels* that medical discourse moved from “the language of fantasy” into “a world of constant visibility” where the doctor’s “gaze” into the interior of corporeal space translated into an investigation of “the world of objects to be known.” Foucault describes this mid-eighteenth century shift in medical knowledge as marking a project wherein the doctor would transform the individual’s body into an object that would “[reveal] through gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain.” In this, Gulliver enacts both the physician’s and the colonizer’s gaze upon the Lilliputians, while also directing his gaze inward, upon the reality of his body. The power which Gulliver reaps from this inspection is one which Foucault likens to a power over death: “The possibility for the individual of being both subject and object of his own knowledge implies an inversion in the structure of finitude,” and, indeed, Gulliver’s survival in the strange lands that he visits becomes dependant on his self-knowledge, examination, and use of his corporeality.

Gulliver, the doctor, has gazed upon “the tangible space of the body, which at the same time is that opaque mass in which secrets, invisible lesions, and the very mystery of origins lie hidden.” As a captive of the Lilliputians, Gulliver is gazed upon, measured, and restrained as a body that the Lilliputians can ex-
amine and control. Foucault describes the mid-eighteenth century shift in medicine’s perception of the body as a move from the investigation of symptoms to the ways in which those symptoms are embedded within and on the body, where “the definition of the individual should be an endless labor . . .”\(^79\): the inspection of the body becomes a marker in the move towards “normality” and the disciplines that will define and control the “abnormal.” The Lilliputians enact this “endless labor” upon Gulliver’s body; it is, in fact, the very nature of the difference and abnormality of his body that thralls and terrifies them, and it is Gulliver’s corporeality that presents the construct to be investigated: the tension between the normal and abnormal, or, as Judith Butler outlines in *Bodies That Matter*, the rendering of the “unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies” which are set against “the domain of intelligible bodies.”\(^80\) Halberstam, similarly, distinguishes the queer body as “unintelligible” by stating that “some bodies are considered ‘expendable’. . .”\(^81\) Both Gulliver and the Lilliputians have encoded very different notions of this intelligible body, and the binary of proper/improper body that defines normality for each is conflated, confused, and corrupted in their mutual examinations. This is what Halberstam calls “technotopic”\(^82\): a “preoccupation with the body as a site created through technological and aesthetic innovation,”\(^83\) and reflects the new 18th Century attitudes towards the body that Foucault discusses.

The endless inspection of Gulliver parallels not only Foucault’s theories of the shift in medical knowledge in the mid-eighteenth century. It also reflects the ways in which raciological thinking becomes a mode for maintaining notions of the normal and the successful construction of the normal/abnormal binary of the corporeal. This is reflected in Paul Gilroy’s discussions concerning the ways in which “the arrival of scientific racism” also emerged “towards the end of the eighteenth century.”\(^84\) In *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Gilroy theorizes that a “New Racism” has emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century which replicates the “scientific” and corporeally-based racism of the late eighteenth century. In this, Gilroy finds that “we are traveling back toward some older, more familiar version of biological determinism,”\(^85\) replicating and re-enacting the kind of scrutiny and examination of the body that both defined Foucault’s stance on the shift in medical percep-

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\(^79\) Ibid., xiv.
\(^81\) Halberstam, 3.
\(^82\) Ibid., 15.
\(^83\) Ibid., 124.
\(^84\) Gilroy, *Against*, 31.
\(^85\) Ibid., 34.
tion, and that underlined the ways in which the body became the determining factor of racism in the 1700s, a factor that is clearly seen in Gulliver’s own minute inspection of his and others’ bodies. Gilroy points out that “The history of scientific writing about ‘races’ has involved a long and meandering sequence of discourses on physical morphology. Bones, skulls, hair, lips, noses, eyes, feet, genitals, and other somatic markers of ‘race’ have a special place in the discursive regimes that produced the truth of ‘race’ and repeatedly discovered it lodged in and on the body.”

Swift’s depiction of Gulliver’s observations of the Lilliputians, and the ways in which he defines them and is defined by corporeal examination, traces the beginnings of producing “somatic markers” to define race and identity. It is perhaps exceptionally interesting that for Gulliver and the Lilliputians, size alone becomes the significant mark of difference between the “civilized” race of Gulliver, and the strange “foreignness” of the Lilliputians, since body size, in extremity, although often utilized as a sign for the freakish or outlandish, is the one corporeality that remains relatively consistent among humans, and, therefore, has never been used as a racial marker. Swift imagines a gigantism alone that defines the races, perhaps foreshadowing and parodying the ways in which the minuteness of corporeal detail was becoming the basis for racism at the time of his writing of *Gulliver’s Travels*.

As a surgeon and the *ad hoc* observer of Lilliput for the English, Gulliver engages in the kinds of racializing definitions that Gilroy delineates as having its origins in the eighteenth century. Citing the work of Londa Schiebinger, Gilroy explains that “the study of bodily components and zones first helped to focus the racializing gaze, to invest it with real scientific authority and to bring ‘race’ into being . . . [which] saturated the interconnected discourses of ‘race,’ nation, and species.” Gulliver clearly delineates the Lilliputians as Other, and, as they do the same to him, climbing on, restraining, and observing his body, Gulliver reacts to the corporeal attention by re-examining his body himself, and discovering the ways in which the functions and processes of his body serve to reinforce his own sense of normalcy and to subvert the racializing gaze which is being enacted upon him. This is what Gilroy defines as “a specific relationship to, and mode of observing, the body,” and what Foucault describes as a process whereby “acquiring the status of object . . . the gaze directed . . . would, in turn, awaken [bodies] and make them stand out against a background of objectivity.” The racializing gaze serves to both create identity and to subjectify the individual, yet it also provides the means with which the individual “sees” him-
self, and “[obtains] positive knowledge about himself . . . ”\(^{90}\) Through this he can, therefore, utilize his corporeality to subvert the definitions that external cultures have embedded within and on the body, and to define the self as “intelligible” as Gulliver does. In focusing on his digestive and excretive functions, and in eliciting an innocent surprise at the Lilliputians’ reactions to his attention to his somatic activity, Gulliver gains control of his subjectivity and re-defines what the ideas of “civilized” and “normal” might mean, also emphasizing the ways in which the normative body morphs into a queer space as it refuses to accept local definitions of the normative, much as the diasporic body performs in the works of Nortje, Kureishi, and Salih.

In this, the character of Gulliver and his attention to his corporeality prefigures the ways in which the body would evolve as a trope on which the very nature of civilization and progress would be inscribed during the progress of coloniality and, later, in the concept of postcoloniality. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock examines the convergence of commodity fetishism and the rise of imperialism, and the ways in which the notions of being “civilized” became complicated with the consumption of goods in the colonizing project. McClintock points out that “imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western industrial modernity,”\(^{91}\) and the creation of race as a distinguishing somatic reality coincides with Foucault’s observations, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, concerning the ways in which the modes of observing the body changed in the mid- to late 18th century. Attention to and observance of the body thus becomes an indelible marker of the inception of the racist, imperial, and modern projects: a confluence of an accumulation of detail and bodily marking that place notions of humanity, civilization, normality, and progress to be inscribed upon corporeal functions and features. For McClintock, the commodity that acts upon the body becomes the very method with which imperialism and “civilization” are transferred to the colonized world. She explains that “More than merely a *symbol* of imperial progress, the domestic commodity becomes the *agent* of history itself,”\(^{92}\) and the colonial project, in its attempts to “clean” and control the “native” body, replicate the very process that Gulliver and his body undergo in Lilliput. The use of commodities then becomes a coded term for normalization, and the “unclean” body is necessarily seen as a non-normative space.

Citing a Pears’ Soap print advertisement from 1899 which advises that “The first step towards lightening THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN is through

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\(^{90}\) Ibid., 198.

\(^{91}\) Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 220.