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ark Dixon is an Eduqas A Level examiner and Head of Media and Film at Durham
xth Form Centre. He is also a freelance author, and has written for *The Guardian*,
ES, *Media Magazine* and *Teach Secondary* as well as authoring a range of digital
esources for Eduqas Media.

over image: STRANGER THINGS, Winona Ryder (Season 2, aired October 27, 2017). ©Netflix/courtesy
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7 Postcolonial theory

Paul Gilroy

Like Hall, Gilroy explores the construction of racial 'otherness' as an underlying presence within print media reportage during the 1970s and 1980s, arguing that criminalised representations of black males regularly stigmatised the black community.

By the 1990s, however, Gilroy shifts his attention to consider the mass media constructions of British identity in postindustrial Britain. He subsequently diagnoses the existence of a media induced 'post-colonial melancholia' as a representational response to the UK's declining global position in the late 1990s. That decline, Gilroy tells us, is realised as a result of the loss of the post-war Empire – a loss that the media cushions with stories that are infused with Union Jack waving nostalgia. For Gilroy, problematically, those stories are also underscored by racial misrepresentations and the amplification of multicultural disharmony in the UK.

Concept 1: racial binaries, otherness and civilisationism

Racial otherness

Gilroy's hugely important study of black representation, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, traces the story of UK race relations from the Second World War onwards, in which the post-war wave of immigration from the West Indies produced a series of anxieties regarding immigrant behaviour. He draws attention to, 'Lurid newspaper reports of black pimps living off the immoral earnings of white women' (Gilroy, 2008, 95) and suggests that the public's association of these post-war immigrants with substandard living conditions produced

racial representations that were 'fixed in a matrix between the imagery of squalor and that of sordid sexuality' (Gilroy, 2008, 97). Such representations, Gilroy argues, marginalised the immigrant black community from the outset – constructing them as a racial 'other' in the predominantly white world of 1950s Britain.

In the two decades following the Second World War, media stories regarding the black community, Gilroy suggests, intensified fears that immigrant communities might swamp white Britain. Those fears were further concentrated in the late 1970s and the 1980s through news coverage that routinely associated the black community with assaults, muggings and other forms of violent crime. 'It is not then a matter of how many blacks there are,' Gilroy writes of the period, 'but [of] the type of danger they represent to the nation' (Gilroy, 2008, 105). Blackness and criminality, Gilroy argues, thus became a 'common sense' feature of the media.

During the 1970s and 1980s, newspapers also related stories concerning the many community riots of the period, often depicting these multi-ethnic disturbances as black only events, and further suggesting the black community was naturally prone to lawlessness and incompatible with white British values. The Notting Hill Carnival riot of 1976 serves as a particularly poignant example, with the rioters described by various newspapers as 'an angry army of black youths' and 'as coloured men in screaming groups' (Gilroy, 2008, 122). The anxieties, Gilroy argues, surrounding individual acts of black criminality – muggings, assaults and so on – tilted towards more generalised descriptions of black criminality, while the political concerns of the black community regarding heavy-handed policing tactics were largely ignored.

Gilroy, too, points to a number articles that inferred black culture's corrosive effects on white youth during this period. For instance, in 1982 *The Daily Mail* reported the detention of several Eton pupils on drugs charges, suggesting that the boys' descent into criminality was prompted by Rastafarian influences. For Gilroy, the story is emblematic of the kinds of racial binaries that the media constructed during the period in which the traditions of white civility – in this case Eton – were increasingly subject to the corrupting influence of a black 'other'.

Civilisationism

For Gilroy, the 9/11 World Trade Centre terrorist attack in 2001, and its aftermath, radically altered both the tone and nature of media-oriented

Box 7.1 Think about it: representations of 'otherness' in the contemporary media

We can sum up Gilroy's main points as follows:

- Second World War immigrants were seen as an alien 'other' to an imagined white Britishness.
- Black immigrants were perceived to be 'swamping' white communities.
- Black communities were demonised through representations that associated them with individual acts of criminality – knife crime and muggings were particular media concerns. These representations construct a 'common sense' notion of the criminal black male.
- Later representations constructed the black community in general, and black youths in particular, to be naturally lawless and incompatible with British white values.
- Later representations suggested that black otherness had a corrosive effect on white youth culture too.

Are the representational anxieties outlined above constructed by the British media today?

- Do contemporary media products continue to produce stories that revolve around 'swamping' themes?
- Are some communities constructed as 'other' by the media? Who and how?
- Are some communities associated with criminal behaviours?
- Are some communities constructed as having a corrupting influence?
- What evidence could we use to suggest that the media has moved on from the kinds of representations of the black community that were created during the 1970s and 1980s?

representations regarding race and racial difference. The Anglo-American response to the attack is perhaps best summed up by then US President George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address in which he declared that North Korea, Iran and Iraq constituted, 'an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world' (Bush, 2002). For Gilroy, Bush's speech consolidates a deeply troubling and imperialist view of global politics that justified foreign intervention on the grounds that Western democracies were morally superior to all other nations. Gilroy's further disquiet

Box 7.2 Apply it: do your set texts construct a civilisationist subtext?

Media depictions that construct stark contrasts between Western readers and Islamic fundamentalism can be located in news and TV drama. Use the following questions to assess the effect of set texts that deploy representations of this nature:

- How do the representations nurture audience fear?
- How do representations dehumanise extremist subjects?
- What effect do these representations have in constructing racial hierarchies?
- Do any of your set texts deconstruct civilisationist assumptions?

Exemplar: *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* front pages, Monday 18 February 2019 (all exam boards). 'Civilisationist' representations, Paul Gilroy argues, are notable for their stark worldview, often presenting a simplistic binary opposition in which Muslim fundamentalism battles Western democratic ideals. The front covers of both *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* often confirm this civilisationist perspective – the reportage surrounding the pregnant 'Jihadi Bride' Shamima Begum, for instance, and her application to return to the UK after joining Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorists is, Gilroy would suggest, deeply problematic. Within that reportage, *The Daily Mail* constructs a sense of Muslim incompatibility, foregrounding the girl's lack of repentance and unwillingness to reintegrate into UK culture while also outlining the existence of 'dozens' of other girls in similar situations. *The Daily Mail* further exaggerates the 'swarming' potential of the story by telling us that the UK might be 'forced' to repatriate the girls. *The Sun* (see Figure 7.1) also infers an overriding lack of public sympathy, while the accompanying photo of black clad hijab-wearing women nursing Shamima's baby constructs a deliberately unsettling depiction of Muslim motherhood. Both papers create an exaggerated sense of fear, using the Muslim 'other' to source that danger.

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SEE PAGE 26

Beeb trans star: Fellas always hit on me

SEE PAGES 14 & 15

JIHADI BRIDE HAS BABY AND ASKS US TO TAKE PITY ON HER

Tragedy ... Molly

Suicide pic curb on web

By KATE FERGUSON

TECH giants should be legally forced to sign up to a compulsory code of ethics, say MPs — and prosecuted if they flout it.

In a damning report today, the parliamentary committee on culture blasts social media firms for "failing in the duty of care" they owe to users.

It follows a growing clamour for a crackdown in the wake of the death of Molly Russell, 14 — who killed herself after viewing self-harm images on Instagram.

In an extraordinary

Continued on Page Two

EXCLUSIVE

'CALL COPS OVER SALA'

£15M deal quiz

SEE BACK PAGE

SYMPATHY? YOU MUST BE KIDDING

By NICK PARKER

TEENAGE Jihadi bride Shamima Begum yesterday begged for public sympathy and a return to Britain after she gave birth to an IS fighter's son.

But Tory MP David Davies said: "The only thing she regrets is that IS lost."

Full Story – Pages Four and Five

TV plea ... Shamima, right, with pal holding new baby

Figure 7.1 *The Sun* front page (Monday 18 February 2019).

© Sun/News Licensing.

surrounding 9/11 is that the media readily accepted and repeated Bush's 'axis of evil' worldview. Gilroy collectively labels these post 9/11 representations as 'civilisationism'. Civilisationism, he argues:

- **Constructs a binary worldview:** President George W. Bush famously declared 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists'. Civilisationist depictions construct similarly stark worldviews, positioning media audiences to internalise a simplistic binary that divides the globe into the opposing forces of fundamentalist terrorists and a morally superior West.
- **Has a racist subtext:** For Gilroy, the 'war on terror' rhetoric of the post 9/11 era perpetuates a long-standing racial hierarchy in which Muslim subjects are positioned as inferior.
- **Nurtures cultural incompatibility:** Because the media is so focused on global conflicts and terrorist action, an inference is made that European and Muslim groups are incompatible communities. Yet, Gilroy reminds us, that generalised inference of racial incompatibility is a media fabrication. Real world racial integration, or 'cosmopolitan conviviality' (Gilroy, 2004, 9) as he calls it, is wholly different. Indeed, racially diverse communities live with few, if any, day-to-day effects of racial difference.
- **Nurtures fear:** For Gilroy, the political repercussions of civilisationism have enabled the construction of a 'securitocracy' (Williams, 2013, 44) – the use of repressive measures by Western democracies that are designed to keep nation states terrorist free. In this way, the inhuman treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, for example, or the torture of terrorist subjects are justified as necessary measures.

Concept 2: the legacy of Empire and British identity

In his 2004 book, *After Empire*, Gilroy suggests that we live in 'morbid culture of a once-imperial nation that has not been able to accept its inevitable loss of prestige' (Gilroy, 2004, 117). The British, he argues, are undergoing a crisis of national identity: the loss of the British Empire, further compounded by the devolution of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, has forced a collective question regarding British identification. 'Is Britain's culture now Morris dancing or line dancing?,' Gilroy asks, 'Are we Gosford Park, Finsbury Park or the park and ride?' (Gilroy, 2004, 130).

The loss of British colonial prestige and the resulting contraction of the UK's global influence have largely been airbrushed from public discourse, Gilroy argues, yet that contraction in national importance has simultaneously affected a deep-rooted cultural anxiety accompanied by a sense of national rootlessness and guilt. For Gilroy, moreover, the immigrant population has become an outward symbol that perpetually reminds the UK nation of its loss of global power. Empire immigrants and their descendants, he argues, are a visible representation of British power as it once was. Post-war racism, he further suggests, also acts as a covert attempt to recover and purify the social order – to restore the English nation to its pre-war state.

The immigrant, Gilroy argues, is also a symbol of British exploitation and of the racial violence perpetuated in the name of Empire, reminding us that colonial expansion and the British imperial project gave birth to the British slave trade and to the brutal repression of indigenous populations across the colonies. The Empire, as such, represents more than the loss of sovereign power. It is also a stain on the collective British identity, the ramifications and extent of which have never been fully explored or acknowledged by the nation as a whole.

World War victories and Albionic Englishness

Gilroy tells us that the twin pull of Empire guilt and the loss of British global power have resulted in a national postcolonial melancholia – a sort of collective depression that both absorbs and blinkers the British outlook. The media, Gilroy suggests, compensates for this collective depression by routinely invoking the mythic victories of the Second World War to distract the national populous from its loss. Indeed, Gilroy reminds us that numerous other British military campaigns and over 70 years of history have elapsed since 1945, yet the Second World War remains a potent media symbol that is routinely invoked by the British media.

The Second World War, Gilroy argues, acts as a powerful set of signifiers that enables us to turn the loss of the British Empire into a moment of significant historical and ideological victory. As such, the media routinely conjures up the spirit of the blitz and the bulldog mentality of Winston Churchill to remind us of our once important historical significance. The media's mythologising of the Second World War, Gilroy further argues, revels in the isolation of Britain and the preservation of an imagined English purity. Wartime allusions, as a result, are routinely invoked in sports and news reportage, with a nostalgic English nationalism adopted as the standard response to World Cup fixtures, Olympic coverage and European politics.

Gilroy, too, draws attention to the media's preoccupation with British tradition as a further response to postcolonial melancholia. The news' obsession with the Royal family and television's routine depictions of the quintessential English rural landscape invoke, Gilroy suggests, an inward looking Albionic Englishness. The media manufactures a long-lost imagined England untouched by the demise of Empire – an England, more importantly, in which racial diversity and multicultural conviviality are strangely absent. Albionic England is the film world of Bridget Jones; it is the English summers that abound in advertising, The Proms and Royal weddings. It is also the English rurality of historical drama – of ITV's *Victoria* and of Netflix's *Crown*. Albion, too, is traceable in *Emmerdale*, *Midsomer Murders* and *George Gently*. But, Gilroy warns, Albion England is nothing more than a distracting fantasy that disguises the reality of what Britain is really like – crippled by regional poverty and an ever-widening economic social divide.

Box 7.3 Discuss it: to what extent are we infected by postcolonial melancholia?

- Is the British media obsessed with the past? Are we a backward-looking nation that cannot come to terms with our diminishing global role? What evidence from the media could you present to support or contradict this idea?
- Why are British newspapers so obsessed with the Royal Family? Do they represent order in a chaotic modern world? Do they represent British tradition?
- Does the media construct an Albionic representation of Britain – a largely white, rural version of England that is celebratory? What products have you seen that construct this imagined version of England?
- Why do you think the media constructs these idealised representations of Albion?

Box 7.4 Apply it: diagnosing postcolonial melancholia in your set texts

Search for moments that affirm Gilroy's view that the UK has been paralysed by postcolonial melancholy. Use the following to help you construct relevant analyses:

- Do any of your set texts create an Albionic representation of the UK? Do they foreground an idealistic or traditional view of England?
- Do the set texts use traditional English institutions to assert an Albionic view? Are they overly concerned with the Royal Family? Do they invoke a traditionally Christian representation of England? Do the set texts defer to English tradition in an idealised way?
- Do the set texts invoke nostalgia or, more specifically, war-oriented nostalgia?
- Are the set texts used to explore/search for an English identity? Do the texts foreground identity anxiety?
- Do the set texts use immigrants as a means of prompting Empire guilt?
- Do the set texts explore hostile attitudes towards immigration?

Exemplar: *The Guardian* online, 19 February 2019 (OCR). *The Guardian* exemplifies much of Gilroy's assertion that the UK media exudes postcolonial melancholia. Its online home page is rich with stories that exemplify English anxiety – the paper's lifestyle section, for example, routinely offers identity advice for an audience struggling, in Gilroy's view at least, to navigate the postcolonial landscape. Articles variously ask burnt-out readers whether they 'Should embrace the power of no?' or ask 'Google: would my life be happier without it?'. *The Guardian* also exemplifies Gilroy's identification of postcolonial Empire guilt. The newspaper's commission of the *Black Sheep* documentary, for instance, charts the experiences of contemporary Nigerian second-generation immigrants against the distinctly non-Albionic backdrop of underclass Essex. White racism is accordingly portrayed as an endemic feature of British society by the short film, the reader is positioned, in Gilroy's view, to witness the melancholic spectacle of a disintegrating Britain.

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Table 7.1 Speak Paul Gilroy

Albionic nostalgia	A representation of Englishness that is marked by nostalgia and generally produces a whitewashed version of an idealised/imagined rural England.
Civilisationism	A stark representation of the world in which Western democracy is pitted against extremist others.
Cosmopolitan conviviality	A term that describes real world multiculturalism and the high levels of racial harmony that mark most people's day-to-day existence. Conversely, the media portrays racial disharmony as the norm.
Postcolonial melancholia	A term used by Gilroy to describe the deep-rooted shame felt as a result of the loss of the British Empire. That loss is deflected through media nostalgia and a widespread anxiety surrounding British identity.

Table 7.2 Gilroy: ten minute revision

Concept 1: *racial binaries, otherness and civilisationism*
- Black communities are constructed as an 'other' to white culture and are associated with criminal activity and lawlessness.
- The media reflect civilisationist attitudes through simplistic reportage and the demonisation of Muslims – media products nurture fear and the idea that Muslims and Europeans are incompatible.

Concept 2: *the enduring legacy of the British Empire on English identity*
- A deep-seated postcolonial melancholia infects the media as a result of Britain's diminishing global importance.
- Postcolonial melancholia prompts a nostalgic construction of Englishness.
- Postcolonial melancholy produces a sense of English rootlessness and an anxiety surrounding British identity.

Two theorists who might challenge Gilroy's thinking
- **David Gauntlett:** would present a far more optimistic picture of the media's capacity to effect change or to enable positive identity construction. He would suggest that the variety of media representations available to contemporary audiences is far greater than that outlined by Gilroy.
- **Henry Jenkins:** would present a far more optimistic view regarding the current media landscape than Gilroy's postcolonial assessment – suggesting that new technologies enable audiences to engage in participatory culture and to form online communities.