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Multiculturalism and the new face of Britain [1]

Anne-Marie Fortier

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Is it possible to reimagine Britain as a nation — a post-nation — in a multicultural way? (Runnymede Trust 2000: 36)

The British and English 'identity crises', in their different guises, have been so widely discussed in the British media in the last thirty years or so, as to have become one of the most contested sites in contemporary political landscape and cultural imagination. More recently, the publication of the controversial report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, also known as 'The Parekh Report' (Runnymede Trust 2000), has revived and moved the debate onto the new grounds of reimaging Britain as a multicultural nation.

In the pages that follow, I consider the kinds of imaginings that multiculturalism fosters, in contemporary Britain. Against the backdrop of the coverage of the Parekh Report, which I summarise below, I examine different representations of multiculturalism in the British media. I am interested in the ways in which Britain is *positively* reimagined as multicultural, rather than simply monocultural. How is multiculturalism represented? How is the national home space of Britain re-imagined as multicultural?

This article is based on a new research project on discourses of multicultural Britain primarily in the British media. Its starting point was the coverage of the Parekh Report in the British-English press in October 2000. Although the focus of the analysis is on the latter, the material



used for this article includes newspaper articles and television programmes produced between January 2000 and March 2001.[ii] Before I go further in outlining the aims of this article, a summary of the contents of, and response to, the Parekh Report is called for.

The report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* was the result of the work of 'the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain', set up in January 1998, by the Runnymede Trust, an independent think tank devoted to promoting racial justice in Britain. 'The Commission's remit was to analyse the current state of multi-ethnic Britain and to propose ways of countering racial discrimination and disadvantage and making Britain a confident and vibrant multicultural society at ease with its rich diversity.' (Runnymede Trust 2000: viii) It was made up of twenty-three individuals drawn from many community backgrounds, all with a long record of active academic and practical engagement with race-related issues in Britain and elsewhere.

In sum, the 373-page report proposes that the reimagining of multicultural Britain rests on a combination of five tasks:

- (a) *reimagining Britain's past story and present identity,*
- (b) *balancing equality and difference, liberty and cohesion, . . .*
- (c) *confronting and eliminating racisms . . .*
- (d) *reducing material inequalities and*
- (e) *building a human rights culture.'*

(Runnymede 2000: 105, 107)

Combining notions of 'imagined community' – with its emphasis on representations – with social policy, the report considers what these five tasks involve in specific areas of social policy: policing, criminal justice, education, culture, health, employment, and asylum and immigration.

The report's main argument is that multi-ethnic Britain must be re-imagined as a *community of communities* if it is to have a future. A key aim supporting this notion is to disentangle Britishness from Englishness by way of redefining Britain as a shared territory rather than as dominated by, and belonging to, a single group.

Everyone belongs to more than one community; every community influences and has an impact on, and in turn is influenced by, others. None is self-sufficient, entire of itself. 'Britain' is the name of the space they all share. Some have far more weight and power than others, but no group, no community, own Britain. It is no one's sole possession. (Runnymede Trust 2000: 105; my emphasis)

The notion 'community of communities' is based on a pluralist model of managing cultural pluralism within a human rights framework, a 'central value' of which is *cultural* recognition (as distinct from social recognition; Runnymede Trust: 43). It is beyond the scope of this article to engage in a detailed discussion of the contents, aims and principles of the Parekh Report, including its adherence to a post-Hegelian politics of recognition (Taylor 1994).[iii] For the purpose of the analysis that follows, the point is that according to the report's logic, one of the outcomes of cultural recognition is that Britain revise its 'national story' and its identity if it is to be truly inclusive and reflective of its multicultural make-up. This was the subject of a heated debate, which I return to in the next section.

What I wish to emphasise at this stage is that a striking feature of the response to the report is the expression of a widely accepted notion that Britain and Britishness *are* inherently multicultural. Indeed, whilst the extreme right (such as the BNP) or ultra-conservatives (such as Norman Tebbit) continue to circulate stock-in-trade clichés about the destructive and destabilising effect of multiculturalism on the coherence and stability of 'the nation', these stereotypes are increasingly incongruous when set against the more widespread discourse about the *inevitability* of multiculture, and its beneficial effects on the nation, strengthened and enriched by its inherent cultural diversity. In the face of the inescapable 'multicultural question', as Stuart Hall (2000) puts it[iv], advocates of the new right as well as the new left, now recognise that Britain is a multicultural society, and that, as a nation it must take stock



and contend with the presence of the 'other' within 'our' midst. As one headline put it, 'We're all a little bit of everything' (*The Daily Mirror*, 20.10.00).

Among this chorus of new multiculturalists, Tory and Labour politicians are also singing to the same tune. The present Labour government has declared its commitment to creating 'One Nation', a country where 'every colour is a good colour' and where 'racial diversity is celebrated.' (in Runnymede Trust 2000: 40) In March 2000, Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that

This nation has been formed by a particularly rich complex of experiences: successive waves of invasion and immigration and trading partnerships, a potent mix of cultures and traditions which have flowed together to make us what we are today. Blood alone does not define our national identity. How can we separate out the Celtic, the Roman, the Saxon, the Norman, the Huguenot, the Jewish, the Asian and the Caribbean and all the other nations that have come and settled here? Why should we want to? It is precisely this rich mix that has made all of us what we are today. (Blair 2000)

In a similar vein, the former Tory leader William Hague stated that 'Britain is a nation of immigrants' (*The Daily Telegraph* 13.10.00), while the once hard line Conservative Michael Portillo appealed for tolerance at the Tory Party conference, in October 2000: 'We are for all Britons', he declared, 'Black Britons, British Asians, white Britons. Britain is a country of rich diversity' (quoted in *The Guardian* 5.10.00)

A common feature of these statements is that they imply an equivalence between what is listed as constituting the nation's diversity. Indeed, Blair's list posits all groups on a system of equivalence, where all appear as ingredients which are added in equal proportion to the making of the 'rich mix' of the nation. There is no dominant group.[v] Moreover, Blair insists that such distinctions are unnecessary. Yet the question is: who does the mixing? I return to this question later OR This question will be the subject of closer attention in a future paper more directly devoted to issues of hybridity. What interests me here is that the nation is perceived almost unanimously as impossible to conceive without *taking in* the cultural minorities.

It is worth noting that one of the issues at stake, here, is the positioning of Britain on the international stage as uniquely multicultural: 'Britain is a much more relaxed multi-cultural society than most others, much more at ease with itself, than almost all other European countries' (Parekh quoted in *Sunday Telegraph* 8.10.00); 'Mr Straw said race relations were probably better in Britain than anywhere in Europe or America – partly because of our culture and its tradition of tolerance.' (*The Daily Telegraph* 12.10.00). Hence Bhikhu Parekh proposes that a formal declaration of multiculturalism in Britain – in the model of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act – would constitute a 'statement of who we are. It is a way of saying to ethnic minorities and *the world* that we not only tolerate but cherish our diversity' (quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* 10.10.00; my emphasis).

As stated earlier, the general question that interests me is *how* multiculturalism is represented. What are the terms in which multiculturalism is 'accepted' and 'recognised'? To paraphrase Sara Ahmed (2000: 97): what happens to the definition of 'national culture' when 'minority cultures' are not only let in, but redefined as *integral* to the nation itself (see also Hage 1998; Mackey 1999)? 'How is the "we" of the nation affirmed *through* the difference of the "stranger cultures" rather than against it?' (Ahmed 2000: 95; emphasis original)

In addition, what are the effects of reimagining the multicultural nation on the constitution of the national subjects? If the national 'we' is affirmed through difference rather than against it, this also means that 'others' are *in place* rather than out of place. The question then is: how are they welcome within the national fold? What are the terms of inclusion? *Who* and *where* are the multicultural/national subjects inhabiting this new home space? By way of addressing these questions, I examine three (TWO?) forms of reimagining multicultural Britain, which I consider as symptoms of wider discursive formations. They are: 'pride politics', 'the face of Britain', and 'the death of Britain'. Although each version has distinctive characteristics and dynamics, they are also linked together by a firm grounding in a liberal conception of the legal, legitimate national subject. Lauren Berlant's work on the national public sphere and the



culture of testimonies is useful in developing this line of argument. Yet, as I will argue, we also need to consider how the liberal conception operates differently on different bodies.

1. 'I'm British and proud of it'

As mentioned above, one of the controversial recommendations of the Parekh Report was that Britain must revise its national story and its identity. In this respect, one short passage in the report was the focus of much media attention:

Britishness, as much as Englishness, has systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations. Whiteness nowhere features as an explicit condition of being British, but it is widely understood that Englishness, and therefore by extension Britishness, is racially coded. . . . Unless these deep-rooted antagonisms to racial and cultural difference can be defeated in practice, as well as symbolically written out of the national story, the idea of a multicultural post-nation remains an empty promise. (Runnymede Trust 2000: 38-39)

Because of its association with white supremacy, white privilege, imperialism, and its historical position at the centre of British political and cultural life, the Parekh Report rejects Englishness as an appropriate identity for ethnic minority Britons. In turn, it reluctantly takes on Britishness as the best available term to designate the common terrain of belonging that 'communities' share. 'Britishness is not ideal', write the authors of the report, 'but at least it appears acceptable, particularly when suitably qualified – black British, Indian British, British Muslim, and so on.' (Runnymede Trust 2000: 38).

This was received with a tide of criticism in the British-English press, and was taken as an unwarranted accusation of racism. 'Straw wants to rewrite our history; "British" is a racist word, says report' (*The Daily Telegraph* 10.10.00); 'Racism slur on the word "British"' (*Daily Mail* 11.10.00). Missing the nuance between racial connotation and racism (Hall 2000b), the report was consistently misrepresented and misquoted as rendering 'British' inherently racist.[vi]

Equally controversial was the claim that the 'national story' should be rethought, reworked, with certain aspects perhaps jettisoned, if the story is to produce a new collective self-image that would be 'more flexible, inclusive, cosmopolitan' (Runnymede Trust 2000: 15). The report rightly calls for a politics of reckoning with the imperial past, which it claims will be achieved through the difficult task of

expunging the traces of an imperial mentality from the national culture, particularly those than involved seeing the white British as a superior race . . . This mentality penetrated everyday life, popular culture and consciousness. It remains active in projected fantasies and fears about difference, and in racialised stereotypes of otherness. The unstated assumption remains that Britishness and whiteness go together, like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. . . . The absence from the national curriculum of a rewritten history of Britain as an imperial force, involving dominance in Ireland as well as in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, is proving from this perspective to be an unmitigated disaster.' (Runnymede Trust 2000: 24-25).

Critiques were quick to seize this, especially the last sentence, and see it as an 'assault on national pride' (*Daily Mail* 10.10.00), a promotion of 'national guilt', a 'brainwashing exercise designed to destroy our sense of nationhood' (*Daily Mail* 11.10.00), and an 'attempt to destroy our centuries-old culture' (*The Sun* 16.10.00). In response, they endeavoured to recover the glories of British history, and its numerous achievements. From Boadicea through the Magna Carta, to the abolitionist movement, Waterloo, and VE Day, these events were presented as evidence of the enduring British values of fairness, resilience, tolerance, democracy and decency. History was brought to trial, and many were queuing up to defend it.

But as Judith Butler (1997b) points out, history is, by virtue of its temporality, unprosecutable. What was put to trial, then, was not so much the 'facts' of history, but, rather, the subjects of history. As Butler writes, 'the juridicalization of history . . . is achieved precisely through the search for subjects to prosecute who might be held accountable and, hence, temporarily resolve the problem of a fundamentally unprosecutable history.' (1997b: 50) The search for,



and prosecution of, those who might be held accountable for the perceived generalised loss of pride and patriotism among Britons dominated much of the debate over the Parekh Report, which was marked by mutual blaming and shaming in a tug of war over who held the highest patriotic moral ground.

On the one hand, conservative rightists accused Lord Parekh, along with the commissioners of the doomed report, the Labour government, the 'chattering classes' and the Islingtonian 'intelligentsia' for being 'ashamed of our history and feel the need to apologise.' (*The Sun* 12.10.00). On the other hand, Jack Straw, then Home Office secretary, reacted by distancing himself, and the government, from the Parekh Report in the face of criticism that he and his Labour colleagues were unpatriotically ashamed of being British. 'I am proud to be English and proud to be British', he declared. 'I am proud of what I believe to be the best of British values,' and he added that he believed there was a 'future for Britain and Britishness.' (quoted in *The Times* 11.10.00). He then joined the collective admonition of blame by pointing the finger to the lack of patriotism of the political left: 'Given the Left's tendency to wash their hands of the notion of nationhood', he wrote in *The Observer* (15.10.00), 'it's unsurprising our perception of Britishness became a conservative one.' The Labour party even appointed their own 'patriotism envoy' in Michael Wills, an education secretary whose task 'is to encourage other members of the government to pay special respect to our national identity – always in their speeches and whenever possible in their policy decisions.' (*The Guardian* 13.11.01).

Pride in Britishness became a resonating mantra that rang through the arguments against the recommendations of the Parekh Report that Britain should rethink its 'national story' and identity. Articles succeeded each other in claiming love and pride in Britain, and disclaiming any shame whatsoever. 'I am a Sri Lankan Tamil who came here 30 years ago. I show my British passport with pride, not shame' (*Daily Mail* 11.10.00); 'In Sydney it felt great being British, and that should never be taken away ... to compete for your country is about taking pride in where you come from.' (Simon Dennis, Olympic gold medallist, in *The Times* 12.10.00); 'I'm proud to be British and call myself British. If you're not proud to be British then you're living in the wrong place.' (Craig David, musician, *Daily Mail* 12.10.00); 'I am proud to be British. I have done well by being in Britain. We are still the country that everybody respects.' (Sarwar Ahmed, 'millionaire magnate', *Daily Mail* 12.10.00); 'I am British. I love my country. I love the Queen. I respect the police . . . There should be no conflict between being black and being British' (Lord Alli, managing director of Carlton Productions, *The Daily Telegraph* 12.10.00); 'I am proud of being British. I have no guilt about it. In spite of the fact I have changed my passport and nationality, I am still a very proud Indian and that makes me a very proud Briton.' (Lord Paul, *The Daily Telegraph* 12.10.00).

Running through these exhortations of pride is one refrain: the repelling of shame. Evacuating shame from the debate clears a space for the only acceptable expression of a 'pure' form of 'political love' that nations seemingly inspire naturally (Anderson 1991: 141). Elspeth Probyn suggests that the repelling of shame and affirmation of pride

reproduces an antagonism between 'us', the shamed, and 'them', the guilty. This is especially effective when bodies who have been shamed group en masse to return the shaming epithets: 'shame at your attitudes – feel guilty at your aversion'. Such tactics . . . produce cultures where shame is absent, but where disgust, blame, resentment seethe under the surface of a sanitised veneer of acceptance. (Probyn 2000: 128)

The politics of pride deployed in response to the Parekh Report seeks precisely to eradicate *shame*: pride in 'our' history, in 'our' country, in 'our' passports, in our multi-ethnic background or inherently migrant character, is repeatedly rehearsed by way of sanitising *Britishness under a veneer of tolerance* (Probyn 2000: 128). But the repelling of shame, here, is not so much about self-affirmation whereby the once shamed body is now declaring its self-pride (Probyn 2000: chapter 6; see also Honneth 1992). Rather, the refusal of shame is also a *refusal to interiorise it*, or to consider that it might be a component of ambivalent forms of attachment to the nation. Shame, here, is already exteriorised and located in the shameful body, who is not the victim, but the culprit who threatens the shared certainty in the value of unhindered national allegiance. The resentment expressed here is against 'them' who are ashamed of 'us'-the-nation, and against 'them' who shame 'us'-the-nation. The effect of enclosing the



figures of shame is to separate 'us' and 'them' into separate and distinct bodies that feel (pride or shame) (Ahmed 2001). Rather than eradicating shame, then, there is rather a process of creating a shameful body – the white working class lout, or the white middle-class Islingtonian cosmopolitan – that must stay in place in order to be hailed again and again as the source of the problem. To put it another way, the repeated declarations and displays of pride simultaneously produce the subjects of pride – the 'proud' subjects and the subjects of 'our' collective pride in 'our' inclusive multiculturalism – and the subjects of shame simultaneously produces the subjects of shame – those who are ashamed as well as those who are 'our' shame. In what follows, I focus on the subjects of pride, and the modalities of their inclusion within the new multicultural national fold.

Deployed as counternarratives to the perceived accusation of racism against Britishness, these declarations of pride are cast as evidence that Britain and Britishness are not racist, that Britain is in fact a great place to 'be ethnic' – 'this is a good country in which to be a member of an ethnic minority' (Raj Chandran, *Daily Mail* 11.10.00) – and that it is possible to be black and British.[vii] But what are the implications of this new imagined multicultural national landscape on the formation, and differentiation, of national subjects within it? To repeat an earlier question, if the 'other' is not only let in, but positioned as integral to multiculturalist thought, what are the terms of this inclusion (Ahmed 2000)? In the case examined here, the modality of inclusion is the personal testimony. Indeed, a striking feature of the pride politics deployed in response to the Parekh Report is the compulsion to testify; the compulsion to publicly declare oneself as a proud Briton; the compulsion to 'speak out' and make visible one's pride in Britishness.

Lauren Berlant (1991, 1997) has written extensively on the work of testimony in public culture and in the politics of the national. In a recent intervention (2001), she discusses the role of testimony in supporting a neo-liberal agenda based on the construction of the voluntaristic, individual, and individuated self. This is particularly relevant to the case examined here, for it raises questions about the relationship between the 'I' who speaks, and the 'we' it simultaneously speaks with, to and of. What do these testimonies reveal about the power of the publicly spoken word? How does the 'I' – the individual, particularised body – relate to the collective 'we' – the national body, the collective mass identification – in textual and visual representations of the self-declared proud Briton?

*I'm proud of being British. I served in the Army for nine-and-a-half years as a Sergeant PT instructor and I never had any problems regarding race. If you're born in Britain, and your parents are British and you live here, then you're British it doesn't matter what colour you are. I don't understand what the issue is. When I was standing on the medal rostrum and looking at the Union Jack, my feeling was for my country. We were representing Great Britain and you have the flag flying for you. (Kelly Holmes, cited in *Daily Mail* 12.10.00)*

Holmes' declaration exemplifies the move of testimony between registers of belonging that blur the distinction between 'I' and 'we', where 'you' is at once separate – interpellating the reader as other, as witness – and inclusive – as in 'if one is born in Britain'. In short, the testimonial 'I' is used on behalf of a collective function, but it operates as a form of self-expression. This is the crux of the power of these declarations. Their meanings reside in the fact that they originate from the action of 'speaking out', which is seen as an *expression* of the speaker's intent and will. Grounded in 'a certain modern faith in the intentional self and its visible effects' (Berlant 2001: 49), these declarations also establish a seamless continuity between the agentic 'I' and the national, speaking subject/citizen. Indeed, the very nature of these testimonies – addressed in the form of the public letter – 'smudges the line between collective and individual subjectivity, speaking ideally to a world but mediated through nonparticularized individualities' (Spiller in Berlant 2001: 43-44). Following Berlant (2001), we can argue that the repeated declarations of personal pride in Britishness comforts the neo-liberal dream that demands the disavowal of any discontinuity between the self-understanding speaker/agent, and the citizen.

The nonparticularisation of the self is striking in Holmes' movement from 'I' to 'we': 'When I was standing on the medal rostrum. . . [w]e were representing Great Britain'. More pointedly, her deparicularisation operates through a separation of the speaking 'I' and the particular



body, from the speaking, collective subject: 'If you're born in Britain, and your parents are British and you live here, then you're British it doesn't matter what colour you are.' Here, the 'I' is totally absent, has withdrawn to clear a space for the collective unmarked body of the amorphous 'you' that is the British subject. 'In the public sphere', writes Berlant, 'speech is more legitimate as it becomes more separate from bodies.' (2001: 48).

In a highly significant move, Holmes is peeling off her skin to declare that 'one' is British no matter what colour she is. David Green, director of Civitas, a rightist independent think-tank, carried out a similar act when he stated:

When I saw Denise Lewis and Audley Harrison speaking at the Olympics I was taking less and less notice of their skin colour and more and more of the fact that what they were saying was full of British attitudes. They were praising their families and talking about hard work. What is important for many people is less their ethnic origin than the fact of being raised in Britain. (cited in The Daily Mail 11.10.00; my emphasis)

The gradual erasure of the skin moves along the gradual recognition that Lewis and Harrison are 'like us', underneath. Likewise, Holmes calls upon 'you', the public readership, to witness that she is like 'you', underneath; that you and she are actually alike. The disembodiment of the legitimate subject follows a visual 'economy of otherness', in Gassan Hage's phrase (1998: 128), whereby some 'others' are more acceptable than other others. Lewis, Harrison, and Holmes are the legitimate 'familiar strangers' (Ahmed 2000: 106-107) because they are entering 'into the bargain of intelligibility' (Berlant 2001: 50). Their skin is shed so they can reveal their true colours: displaying the right attitude and uttering the right things – wave the Union Jack, praise family values, sanction the work ethic – thus making them eligible for incorporation within the 'welcoming' nation, who in turn can claim its own distinctiveness as a tolerant and inclusive society. The 'spontaneous' testimonies that arose against the Parekh Report, then, were at once individual and impersonal, as they were simultaneously reasserting the belief in the voluntaristic self, and evoking the formless legal subject/citizen. In other words, they operated as 'marker[s] of juridical/confessional personhood on the one hand and . . . as a form of self expression [on the other]' (Berlant 2001: 49).

Berlant's argument is useful for cautioning against the separation of 'speaking out' from the conventions of self-expression in neo-liberal forms of governance (Ahmed and Stacey 2001: 4). To be sure, the ongoing modernisation of Britain is deeply connected to neo-liberal conceptions of the agentic subject, the voluntaristic self who determines her fate (Haylett 2001). Within this model, the new multicultural Britain is imagined as inhabited by subjects who choose and move between identities/communities, the borders of which are fluid – a view that the authors of the Parekh Report adhere to. But while this analysis is central to the understanding of the formation of the legal subject and the amorphous citizen, it fails to consider how this operates differently on different bodies. There is an uninterrogated assumption that *any* body, insofar as they 'enter into the bargain of intelligibility' (Berlant 2001: 49-50), has unproblematic access to citizenship and legal/legitimate personhood. This fails to account for the ascription of identities, and indeed of bodies, to some citizens rather than others. What happens, then, when speech is not separated from the body, but rather connected to particular bodies? How can we account for the fact that, in the pride politics displayed in October 2000, the visual representation of the 'beautiful face of pride' is predominantly, if not exclusively, black or brown – as opposed to the 'ugly face of patriotism' (*The Guardian* 12.10.00), typically represented as the white working class BNP activist or football hooligan?[viii] What does it mean to call upon particular bodies to be seen to declare their allegiance to Britishness? In multiculturalist Britain, conceptions of the universal formless citizen (as in 'the face of Britain', which I discuss below) is paired with the view that ethnic minorities are also *ascribed* identities which must not only be recognised as equal, but which must also *stay in place as 'other'* in order to claim the *multi* of multiculturalism.

It bears repetition that this particular display of pride was meant as a counter attack to the perceived allegation by the Parekh Report that Britishness is racist. Newspapers thus called upon members of ethnic minorities to speak out and be seen as proud Britons. These individuals were hailed as already recognised, legitimate speaking subjects. But as Judith Butler reminds us – the performative effects of speech acts are relevant here – rather than simply being conferred on the subject, recognition 'forms that subject' (1993: 226). Thus the



paradox inherent in the testimonial: testifying results from being called upon as an already formed speaking subject, while its performance *constructs* that very 'subject' (Butler 1997a). To put it differently, while the testimony relies on conventions of forms of self-expression, the testimony also brings into being the self-expressive willing national subject (Butler 1993: 220): 'The truth is that nobody forced me or any other immigrant to become British. I did so by choice' (Raj Chandran, *Daily Mail* 10.10.00). And because of the emphasis on choice and will, the possibility of refusal is also open.

But again, this does not account for how *some* bodies might be hailed differently than others. Thus as Sara Ahmed writes, 'Hailing as a form of recognition which constitutes the subject it recognises . . . might function to differentiate *between* subjects, for example, by hailing differently those *who seem to belong and those who might already be assigned a place – out of place – as "suspect"*.' (2000: 23; second emphasis mine). In other words, these black-British and British-Asians were 'hailed' in the Althusserian sense of being called upon to be accountable, to declare their attachment to Britain, whereby they will be recognised as legitimate subjects. But the very act of hailing 'them' as 'ethnic' – which in Britain still means 'immigrant' and 'non-white' – also produces them as already suspect of dis-identification. Consequently, the very identity of black/Asian-British, which the repeated declarations of pride sought to consolidate, is rather rendered indeterminate. Indeed, their hailing last October can be read as a prelude to the more recent hailing of British-Muslims, who are repeatedly required to testify their allegiance to Britain, their condemnation of the attacks in the US in September 2001, *and* their support of the bombing of Afghanistan.[ix] Thus while these proud faces of new multiculturalist Britain comfort the nation in its claims to be a leading model of multiculturalism on the international stage, it is their very 'difference' that marks them as alien, even as potential 'enemy aliens'. In a context where the possibility of *dis*identification, or at least ambivalent forms of connection with 'being British' are insistently foreclosed, it is those whose must *acquire* the right to dwell, acquire the status of legitimate personhood and citizenship, who are called upon to be seen to testify their allegiance. This stands in stark contrast to the silent, anonymous figure of the white national subject, whose national allegiance and national belonging go unquestioned.

2. The face of Britain

(NOTE: to view 'the face of Britain', see <http://www.haverhill2000.com/haverhill/pages/finmain.html> and click on the image at the bottom. This page is part of the 'Haverhill 2000' web site www.haverhill2000.com)

'Meet the population of Britain' (*The Guardian* 30.03.01), '[t]he face of Britain' (*Daily Mail*, 30.03.01). This photograph was produced by photographer Chris Dorley-Brown from the photographic portraits of 1 900 residents of Haverhill, Suffolk, male and female, aged six months to eighty years old, allegedly from fifty different ethnic groups.[x] The 1 900 photographs were digitally merged to create what has been perceived as the 'average 21st century Briton' ('The Editor', *The Guardian* 6.04.01: 3). 'Although it is taken from a snapshot of people in the town of Haverhill', said Dorley-Brown, 'it could really represent the face of the average person in Britain' (quoted in *Daily Mail* 30.03.01). It is worth stating from the outset that what interests me here, is the coverage of the photograph, rather than the photographer's own intentions, or his ideas about 'multicultural Britain'. This being said, the question that interests me is: what does making this composite photograph of 1 900 residents of a small town in Suffolk into a national fantasy, tell us about the ways in which national identity is imagined?[xi]

The photograph was revealed in national newspapers in March 2001, in the context of intense public debate over the present and future of Britain. Earlier in the month, William Hague delivered his infamous 'foreign land' speech, where he warned against the future of Britain if another Labour government were to be elected in the elections that were to take place the following May. Although he warned against the dangers of a number of Labour tendencies, such as their support for the single European currency and their perceived lenience on crime, the speech also heavily stressed the dangers of 'open-door' policies regarding asylum seekers, further entrenching the fear that Britain would be swamped by 'bogus asylum seekers'. In a dreadful echo of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood speech', Hague fostered the



image of a Britain where the British people would no longer feel at home in their own land. Later in the month, media attention was on a row within the Conservative Party over the definition of Britishness. The day before Dorley-Brown's photograph appeared in national newspapers, John Townend, labelled a 'rebel' Conservative MP by *The Daily Telegraph*, declared that 'our homogeneous Anglo-Saxon society has been seriously undermined by the massive immigration – particularly Commonwealth immigration – that has taken place since the [Second World] war.' (*The Daily Telegraph* 29.03.01) His comments were immediately denounced by the then Tory Party leader William Hague, and the Tory peer Lord Taylor (amongst others).

It is in this context that the photograph was produced and celebrated as an emblem of national identity. To be sure, the photograph was newsworthy in part because of the technological process behind its making, known as 'morphing'. Morphing, in photography, is not new. It was devised in the mid 1800s by Francis Galton, Charles Darwin's cousin, as a technique for producing composite photographs from standardised portraits, with which he would record 'ideal-typical features' from large groups of people (convicts, the 'insane', public school boys, Jews, and so on). Galton's aims were differentialist and closely linked to genetic and racist theories about 'human degeneration'.

The work of Francis Galton and some of his contemporaries were the subject of an exhibition on the use of photography as a form of policing and constructing identities, at the National Portrait Gallery in London, in 2001 (see Hamilton and Hargreaves 2001). Hanging on the wall next to the entrance to the exhibition room, was Dorley Brown's photograph, a testimony to the contemporary legacy of the 19th century invention. But the connections made between Dorley-Brown and Galton was strictly technological. Indeed, Dorley-Brown's project is inclusive rather than differentialist – or at least perceived as such – as it purportedly 'included representatives of about 50 ethnic minorities, showing the cultural diversity of the town.' (*Daily Mail* 30.03.01).

While Galton used the technology to construct the intelligibility of human bodies and to classify them according to their features, 'morphing', in contemporary popular culture, has become a catchphrase denoting a state-of-the art graphic special effect that represents the *unintelligibility* of the visibly body (Berlant 1997: 209). Most often associated with computer graphics used in film, video and television, the 'morph' is the moving image of transformation, where an object or body appears to reshape itself gradually into another object or body, in full view of the audience.[xii] As such, it reveals the fluidity and uncertainty of the visible body, subverts the visual economy upon which a politics of recognition rests, and destabilises the formulaic visual economy of identity forms (Berlant 1997; Sobchack 2000). Although the processes of transformation are invisible in static images such as photographs, viewers of Dorley-Brown's image were nonetheless impressed by the result of what they knew as the transformation and melding of 1 900 faces into one. The applauded inclusiveness of Dorley-Brown's 'quest to find the average British face' (*The Times* 30.03.01) could be seen as the expression of a genuine collective desire 'to counter the national/global traffic in stereotypes of nationality, race, sexuality and gender.' (Berlant 1997: 209) Such a desire was expressed by Jack Straw, the former home secretary, who wrote in *The Observer* (15.10.00) that: 'After all, we encompass more than one nation and an enormous range of races, accents and attitudes . . . Melding all this into a shared identity was always going to be a challenge.' Dorley-Brown's photograph can be seen as the technological answer to the challenge of melding; the technological resolution to differentialist politics of identity.

This is particularly relevant to Dorley-Brown's photograph. Morphing technology can be used in an array of different ways, including composites that reveal the stitches, collages, juxtapositions, and other traits that actually produce more disturbingly unreal image.[xiii] The neatness of Dorley-Brown's work hung in stark contrast to his predecessors' work at the National Portrait Gallery, for instance: the nineteenth-century composites looked like the superimposition of two or more ghostly figures. Dorley-Brown's photo rather looks like the photograph of a real person when in fact it is a Frankenstein monster, composed from an array of photographs of 'real' people. Concealing the stitches of the technological surgery involved in melding 1 900 faces, hiding the scars or deformities, have produced this smoothed out youthful face.[xiv] A face that was hailed for its 'beautifully proportioned features' (*Daily*



Mail 30.03.01; also *The Times* 30.03.01) which, for its creator, are a testimony to his 'belief in the attractiveness of the human race' (Dorley-Brown cited in *The Guardian* and *The Times* 30.03.01).

Given its alleged mix of people from fifty different ethnic groups, Dorley-Brown's morphing could be read as refuting roots and essences and as seeking to establish connections between human subjects outside of a racial economy of reproduction. When visiting the website that traces the image's genealogy, one is hard pressed to 'recognise' fifty different ethnic groupings from the photographs of the generations of morphs that precede this one. In this respect, Dorley-Brown's genealogy resists any form of phenotypic indexation.[xv] Dorley-Brown does not engage in disaggregating, categorizing or managing the circulation of the contemporary 'ethnic'. On the contrary, the impetus, it seems, is not so much to defend the integrity of cultural difference, but, rather, to preserve the sanctity of the universal.

But this universal, however, is deeply wedded to the power of an unmarked whiteness (Dyer 1997). 'Although the project was designed to produce a virtual representation of Haverhill's population', wrote *The Guardian*, 'the photographic artist believes it captures the entire country just as well.' (30.03.01) And it continues, quoting the photographer: 'No doubt I would have got different results if I had done it somewhere like Botswana or Mexico'. What would be that difference? Why would it have been different? The choice of examples is telling: why not France, or Canada? And what about other areas of the UK? What if the project had been in London, or Manchester, or Bradford?[xvi] Is the unsaid assumption that the face would have been darker, hence *not* 'capturing' Britain? Is it that the whiteness of the face of Britain renders it recognisably British? Would it not have been heralded as British had its skin been darker? Despite their indeterminacy, the unsaid assumptions, here, have a powerful effect: they reinstate, and celebrate, an assimilationist approach to achieving universalist aims. The universalist claims operate through an *unmarked politics of recognition*, based on the unquestioned liberal assumption that the universal is 'a valorisation rather than a cultural and political articulation' (Hesse 1999: 211). That is, a universalism articulated outside an influential particularism (Hesse 1999: 211).

Decidedly located in the present, the face of Britain erases history. It is a body without history: the face of Britain reveals a youthful face, 'with not a line or a wrinkle' (*Daily Mail* 30.03.01), with only the labour of a faint smile. This looks like a photograph of an actually existing human being who could come from *anywhere* in the UK. Unlike the Parekh Report's good citizen who is necessarily attached to an ethnic, local community, this representative of the 'average 21st century Briton' ('The Editor', *The Guardian* 6.04.01: 3) is at once unlocated – in history and geography – and aligned to the wider national community, thus becoming a fantasy image of 'the way we are' (*The Guardian* 30.03.01; my emphasis). This face 'ensures the difference of no difference in the human family' (Haraway 1997: 265). The violence here does not consist in the establishment of a hierarchy of domination based on ideas of racial, gender or sexual difference. The 'violence consists in the evacuation of histories of domination and resistance . . . through technological reproduction (Castañeda in Haraway 1997: 264). In this sense, technology is seen as the resolution of histories of domination based on established notions of visible difference. The unequivocal location of the face of Britain in the present, requires of the face the nation already is, not to have a memory (Berlant 1997: 201). For those who occupy a position of power within structures of difference, the injunction for social amnesia can constitute what Eve Sedgwick (1994) has called 'the privilege of unknowing', where ignorance is power. However, for others who are disadvantaged by the same structures of difference, the injunction for social amnesia can be equivalent to imposed silence and marginalisation.

To paraphrase Lauren Berlant (1997: 201), the new face of Britain involves a melding of different faces with the sutures erased and the proportions made perfect; s/he is a national fantasy from the present representing a posthistorical future. Read in the context in which it was produced – a context of intense collective anxiety and debate over the re-definition of a brighter, more inclusive future for Britain as a nation – this face can be seen as an abstraction that mimes the abstraction of the promise of new Britain which retains power *because* it is un-lived. (Berlant 1997: 202; emphasis original) But the 'face of Britain' also draws its power as



a projection of who 'we' are onto a figure 'out there', with a life of its own – *The Mail* (30.03.01) speculates that this could be a young actress, a model, or a member of a boy band – but which at the same time, is cut off from the social and material relations that determine its existence (Ahmed 2000: 5). In other words, the enigmatic form of the figure is a substitution for, and a concealment of, the social relations that shape its very presence. The very anonymity of the figure renders it detached from any social and material connection, and its historical connection is confined to the present. The negated subjects, here, are 'not predominantly marked by revelations of [their] all-too-intelligible corporeality, but by [their] anonymity.' (Berlant 2001: 46) The striking thing about the face of Britain is that its very form – the face – is seen as an exemplary anonymity that mirrors the formlessness – its generic significance, unlocatedness, a-historicity, undecidability – of the universal and abstract subject enabled by law (Berlant 2001: 46).

If the morph results from the connection of human beings that have no necessary connection within a racial economy of difference, there remains, however, a *necessary* connection that operates through sexuality. A distinctive feature of the 'face of Britain' is how it was said to be 'spooky, gender-free' (*The Guardian* 30.03.01), its gender undecidable. Yet in the website that tells the story of the image's creation, while the alleged ethnic diversity at the origin of the face of Britain is unmarked, the sexual differentiation is clearly demarcated. Visitors to the website can navigate between the different 'generations' [sic] of morphings, leading to the 'final morphs' which are organised in a recognisable genealogical arborescent structure (see <http://www.haverhill2000.com/haverhill/pages/finmain.html>). Moving from top to bottom, males and females are gradually coupled to produce the 'parents' of the final morph. The genealogy of the morph reveals that it has been bred through virtual heterosexual reproductive acts.

The connections of (hetero)sexual love are a key site, in today's Britain, where both the limits and potential of multiculturalism are embattled. Indeed, heterosexual love and marriage are emblems of both the threatening and emancipating pathways towards the achievement of a fully multicultural nation. One the one hand, the BNP's recent appeal to ethnic minorities in their magazine *Identity* (July 2001), clearly frames the new relationship as 'Friends *not* family, cooperation not membership' (cited in Back 2001; emphasis original), reaffirming the rigidity of ethnic and racial boundaries by clearly tracing the blood lines of acceptable affiliation. On the other hand, centre-left thinkers resort to marriage as the ultimate symbol of achieved multiculturalism. In October 2000, Lady Gavron, a member of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, reportedly declared: 'It would have been great if Prince Charles had been told to marry someone black. Imagine what message that would have sent out' (cited in *The Telegraph* 17.10.00). In a perhaps less extravagant example, Andrew Marr, in his book *The Day Britain Died* (2000), uses the rate of intermarriage as the *best* indicator of the mingling of 'today's new British . . . with the old British' (2000: 155; my emphasis).

In a similar vein, according to a recent article in *The Observer*, mixed race children are emblems of new mixed Britain. Meet Genevieve, whose mother is Italian and father, West Indian. Genevieve (ACETATE 5)

*Has the enviable quality of looking as though she would be at home anywhere in the world. [like the face of Britain, she is unlocatable] And her look is one that will become increasingly familiar, and – in the worlds of fashion and beauty – increasingly sought after. . . . Genevieve is the new English rose. . . . At the turn of the twenty-first century . . . England's rose has become more of a bronzed, burnished, sunflower, equally at home in the Arabian Gulf, the Caribbean or the South China Sea. She is a hybrid, as likely to be part-Indian, Jamaican, Greek, Ethiopian, Japanese or Chinese as the old-fashioned blend of English and Irish. (Tamsin Blanchard 'Model of a modern Briton', *The Observer* 25.11.01, p. 10 in the Race in Britain supplement)*

Of course, the recognition of 'mixed race' children can be read as a rebuke to BNP's order not to mix. Still, the genealogy of the 'average Briton' comforts the nationalist ideology of the family as the corner stone of society. It returns us to a model of human bonding through kinship and 'the family', to the 'ties of blood', to, as Lauren Berlant (1997: 209) states



heterosocial marriage as a model of assimilation . . . where sexual . . . “difference” is obscured through an ideology/ethics of consensual “melding” that involves channelling one’s world-making desires and energy into a family institution through which the future of one’s personhood is supposed to unfold effortlessly.

If mixed race children are *destabilising* because they reveal the fluidity of *visible* racial bodily difference, they are also reassuring because their very existence *re-stabilises* anxieties about the fluidity and *invisibility* – hence unintelligibility – of sexual difference. To put it simply, the potential anxieties over the queerness of the new face of Britain – either its gender queerness or its racial queerness – are deflected through her genealogy steeped in heterosexuality, and in the reassertion of heteronormativity as a condition to social membership.

Hence the bond to the nation gets figured as heterosexual and the product of this bond, the *legitimate* offspring of this bond, is the promise of the future. ‘Enter Genevieve’, concludes Tamsin Blanchard in the *Observer* article, ‘the new girl next door. *The world is yours.*’

The role of generations is worth noting here. Generations are typically used in immigration and ethnic studies to periodize the settlement and adaptation of a population within the ‘country of adoption’. Changes in the cultural life of migrant communities abroad are typically expressed in terms of generations: you are probably familiar with the canonical three-generational version of assimilation or integration. Indeed, the process of estrangement from the ‘original culture’ is portrayed by the succession of generations of emigrants and their descendants. Generations, in this discourse, punctuate the gradual degeneration of an imagined ‘original’ culture. Likewise, it is in the name of the preservation of this original culture that emigrant leaders seek to formalize cultural links between ‘younger generations’ and the past, for example by providing language and culture classes.

Werner Sollors suggests that generations are also used as a metaphor that works ‘as a community-building device’ (Sollors 1986: 223). That is to say that generations provide a particular way of speaking of changes within a collectivity, in this case a national collectivity as a whole. Generations become emblems of common concerns. Put differently, rather than being a fragmentation device, generational differences serve to create and unify the national community. The new English Rose moves beyond the problematic of generations caught between two cultures. Rather, she embodies the creative potential of ‘culture’s in between’ (Bhabha 1993), that contact zone where two cultures/races meet, each of which, however, is conceived, in the above account, as an enclosed and inalterable entity.

This is a celebration of consensual melding and of consensual *melting* of difference. This chic notion of hybridity is premised upon a pleasure seeking idea of cross-cultural encounter that hides the power relations constitutive of the very conditions surrounding the presence of different ethnic groups. As Sara Ahmed suggests, this narrative involves ‘modes of encounter that suggest the proximity of [blacks and whites] in different spaces within a globalized economy of difference. *But being “in it” clearly does not mean we are “in it” in the same way.*’ (Ahmed 2000: 171; emphasis added).

The model of modern Britain is female, the offspring of heterosexual love, and part white. Indeed, new hybridised Britain always has a white element. Genevieve’s mother is presumably white. Genevieve is *part* Indian, Jamaican, Greek, Chinese, etc. In the ‘mixed’ category of the census question on ethnic identity, English is mixed with Jamaican, Caribbean, Asian, and so on. Other mixings are all bundled under the indeterminate ‘Other-other’ category. One image that comes to mind is that of ‘colours that run’. Within the maelstrom of new English hybridity that many long for, whiteness remains ‘white’, it is a colour that does not run. The celebration of miscegenation is one which strengthens whiteness and dilutes the darker side of Britishness. Mightn’t the celebration of interracial love between whites and ‘others’ be another way of deflecting the ‘queer’ consequences of their ‘queer’ ways? Mightn’t the mixing of white with others be celebrated as a way to render ‘others’ more ‘like use’, to create them in our own image? Heterosexual love becomes a central device in assimilation in the full sense of the word: the disappearance of impurities and rendering others more and more familiar.



'[I]f whites must be racialized in the new national order [as they are] racial identity must be turned into a national family value. ... [T]he national archive ... is here organized around a future race of cyborgs, or mixed-race but still white-enough children.' (Berlant 1997: 207)

3. The death of Britain[xvii]

The third version of multicultural Britain I examine is Andrew Marr's *The Day Britain Died*. Marr, a journalist, was a member of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, but resigned when he was appointed political editor for the BBC. At the beginning of 2000, before the Parekh Report was published, a three-part series written and presented by Marr was shown on BBC 2. *The Day Britain Died*, which is also a book, considers the future of Britain in the context of globalisation, devolution, animal rights activism, anti-capitalist protests, and multiculturalism.

Marr's intervention inserts itself within a long list of books and television productions released in the 1990s and in the first years of 2000, devoted to questioning the identity of Britain and England. Marr's account results from his journeys across the country, following the genre established by George Orwell's own quest for the essence of England and Englishness[xviii] (1937/1975; see also Howe 1999, Keane 2000?). It is worth noting, as Sukhdev Sandhu has, that 'This quest to find out who we really are seems to be a peculiarly male obsession.' (*The Independent* 31.01.00)[xix] Surely it would be worth investigating the specificities of the contemporary versions of the male flâneur who traverses the country in search of authentic Englishness/Britishness, old and new, gazing at the inhabitants of the 'heart of England', wherever that might be. But for the purpose of this essay, I shall focus on Marr's wanderings and his gendered representation of the future of Britain, which also returns us to the opposition between the 'good' and the 'bad' British subjects.

Received as the centre-left's answer to the predominantly rightwing interventions on Englishness, Marr's contribution nonetheless starts from the same point: what does Britain mean now, following devolution, globalisation, and the relentless erosion of British-Englishness (and British-English)? Like most other contributors to the wave of agonistic self-interrogation about who 'we' are, Marr's premise is that 'old Britain' is waning. The question he asks is: is it worth saving? The short answer is: no and yes. No to the 'xenophobic, small-minded England'. But yes to the 'tolerant', new internationalist, globalised, and devolved Britain.

Marr's view is more optimistic than the apocalyptic vision of Darcus Howe's 'lost Englishness' (2000), and less sentimental than Roger Scruton's elegy (2000). Interestingly for the object of this paper, it is in the 'dynamic edge' of London, rather than the 'heart of England', that Marr finds the routes to 21st century Britain (2000a: 133). More specifically, it is in two adjoining 'cities' in the east end of London – the 'City city', and the 'migrants' city' – that Marr finds the way to the future. Although they are 'imaginatively . . . worlds apart – the city of the poor and the city of the rich . . . the truth is that migration and the global economy are between them creating a new England.' These two cities, he writes, 'are colonising the English story, eating the old compact, dour, white nation away from within.' (2000c)

As the 'prime symbol and engine of British internationalism', the City of London is, for Marr, 'the obvious place to start' looking at the impact of globalisation on the country's future (2000a: 134, 135). Offering staggering statistics about the economic activity of the City, Marr makes a convincing argument about Britain's leading role in the world economy. More importantly for Marr, however, the City is a harbour of international cultural diversity: forty percent of the City's employees work for foreign companies, and many of the traders, consultants, and so on, are American, German, Japanese, and French (2000a: 135). For Marr, 'the financial city stands for the global culture' (2000c) and for 'global power that is inside the products that are inside our houses and inside the computer-web that is now inside our heads' (2000a: 134). But the City is not the sole factor influencing the extent to which 'the global gets within us' (Stacey 2000). Marr also includes the Net, the internationalisation of football, 'Brit art', and the growth of 'Atlantican' culture of US-style coffee bars, US-British star authors, US television programmes, and US clothing (2000a: 135-148; 2000c; 1999).



The migrants' city, for its part, raises more 'serious' [sic] issues about class and racial marginalisation. 'Yes, of course', he writes, the "migrant City" represented by Brick Lane in this fable has many dark corners – England's Bangladeshis are still one of the UK's poorest communities, young black men have appalling unemployment problems. But other groups of new British have been fantastically successful. (2000c)

It is this group of successful 'new British' – in Brick Lane as well as in the City – that fascinates Marr, and the question on his mind is twofold. First, 'these flows of people into . . . Britain make for some hard questions about what kind of country we are, and want to be' (2000a: 153-154). Second, 'how would the breakup of the British union affect the groups of New British still putting down roots here?' (2000a: 156).

By way of musing on how Britain might look in the future, and what the end of Britain 'as we know it' might mean for ethnic minorities, or 'visible minorities' as he calls them, Marr visits Brick Lane, the heart of the 'migrant city', in London's East End. This is an area best known for its history of successive immigration from different parts of the world: the French Huguenots, Russian and Polish Jews, Bengalis, Somalis, and Bangladeshis. As he wanders the streets of what he claims reflects the new, trendy 'London of the 2000s', he meets different men: Bashir Ahmed, a self-declared 'street intellectual' and 'British-African-Asian', exhibiting an elaborate painted wooden sculpture laid out on the pavement. The art work represents a morphed Union Jack, the two crosses removed leaving blank pathways to walk through, leaving the panels where the colours (red and blue) were bleeding and swirl into each other, representing British culture as an amalgamation of different cultures. 'It's about the multicultural landscape of Britain', says the artist, 'It's the changing face of Britain.' (Marr 2000a: 158). Second, Mukheem Ahmed, a self-declared British Bangladeshi, a successful businessman who owns the trendy Café Naz on Brick Lane, that specialises in new-wave Indian food (2000a: 159). Third, Marr speaks to members of Asian Dub Foundation, a protest music band who performs a mix of banghra and hard rock music to anti-racist lyrics. (2000a: 161).

A first remark imposes itself about the gendered nature of Marr's modern Britain. In both the television series and his written accounts, women are remarkably silent, if not totally absent. The future, and present, of international Britain is male, whether it be in Brick Lane, the City, the Net, or football – 'a key part of male identity, both local and national' (2000a: 145). What's more, Marr concludes his chapter on 'The new British and the world' with an analogy between the collapse of old-style nationalism – based on political and military strength – and the collapse of the WWII comic strip market. Replaced by science fiction, the old heroes simply come in new clothes and new places (another planet or galaxy). Thus the important male rite of passage is preserved: 'Somebody is disempowered and they overcome various obstacles and become empowered' (Pat Mills, comic strip writer, in Marr 2000a: 169). Throughout the chapter, speaking men, the majority of which are identified as 'visible minorities', appear as supporting actors in the empowerment of the (white) collective male ego, who is having the hardest time if, as in Britain, he lives in a post-imperial nation (Marr 2000a: 167). The recognised, legitimate, internationalist, multicultural speaking citizen is the economically successful, articulate, and creative male subject who is, significantly, leading Britain to re-defining itself, and renew its pride, in terms of *lifestyle and culture*, rather than political and military strength (2000a: 167).[xx] I shall return to this point later.

Returning to Brick Lane, the immigrants are represented as constituting a heterogeneous population that *lives mainly outside and on the streets of London*[xxi] (Berlant 1997: 195). The British-ethnic minority is a public figure; he has no privacy; indeed, he is a 'visible minority' (Marr 2000a: 154; my emphasis). 'In contrast to the zone of privacy where . . . white people, and citizens who don't make waves with their bodies can imagine they reside' (Berlant 1997: 191), he/she lives in the streets and produces commodities for the public market. Marr's camera takes us in the crowded streets of Brick Lane on the day of a festival, where loud music, dancing bodies, simmering food, and a car swaying to the body movements of the youth crowded inside, offer a buzzing, lively picture of life amongst the new British. In contrast to the silent, unlocatable, distant face of Britain, who can be from *anywhere*, these new faces



of Britain are making waves and drawing large crowds with them, whilst being unquestionably located in a geographical area.

Marr expresses a strong enthusiasm for the positive effects of immigration on national life and the move away from monocultural to multicultural Britain. To be sure, he applauds the de-centring of Englishness, and the denaturalisation of Britishness-as-whiteness. His reflections draw from the experience and presence of ethnic minorities to force an interrogation of the particular historical, political and cultural articulations of the universal assumptions about Britishness and Englishness. In line with the Parekh Report, he too stresses the urgency for 'new stories' – 'England is waking up. She needs a new memory' (2000c) – that recover a forgotten past: the imperial, racist as well as the progressive and internationalist past (2000a; 2000c).

At the same time, England remains central in Marr's contemplation of a secure future for Britain. 'Without a self confident and self-aware England, Britishness is doomed.' (2000c). And this England will thrive only by embracing the cultural *mélange* that could result from its present diversity: 'I would rather be a citizen of a mixed Britain than a purely white one' (2000a: 162). In Marr's new England and modern Britain, 'non-white communities . . . are bound to matter more . . . than even their considerable numbers would suggest' (2000a: 154)

Quite a few people who are going to shape our lives over the next 50 years are children today who do not speak English as their first tongue and are struggling in inner-city schools. There will be, somewhere out there, a Black Thatcher, and Albanian Mick Jagger and a Chinese David Hockney – and maybe, if we are lucky, a Bangladeshi Bill Gates. (2000a: 162; my emphasis)

The expected success of these dark skinned allophones is paving the way to the nation's future, promising 'us' a new future. There is something special about today's minorities: something that gives special force and velocity to the immigrants' cultural practices, which are changing people's everyday lives in a radical way. And that something is marked in terms of skin colour and language, on the one hand, and lifestyle, on the other.

First, as Maureen McNeil suggests[xxii], one image that comes to mind is that of 'colours that run', like in Bashir Ahmed's 'running' Union Jack, where reds and blues bleed into each other to produce a dark marbled effect, speckled with white dots. Within the maelstrom of new English hybridity that Marr longs for, whiteness remains 'white', it is a colour that does not run. It, 'we', will be changed by 'them'; through the effects of 'others' on us, if we recognise 'them' non only as equal, but as paving the way to a more open future . . . as well as to a more tasty cuisine.

As Matthew Taylor declared in his own gastronomic ventures in Brick Lane, 'multiculturalism is very very fattening' (2001). This relates to my second point. Marr is ensconced in commodity multiculturalism, or what Gassan Hage (1997) has coined 'cosmo-multiculturalism', that is 'a multiculturalism without migrants' which produces 'ethnic products as forms of exoticism for the international market' (in Threadgold 2000: 198). In the BBC2 production of *The Day Britain Died*, the camera moves from sari clad women to youth dancing to *banghra*, to turban-wearing Sikh men, to whites eating *pakor*as. Multiculture, here, is signified by lifestyles: the discourse assigns to migrant cultures a different mode of existence to Anglo-Saxon culture, and these are *seen* to be expressed in their lifestyles, which become valorised tokens of ethnic diversity in contemporary consumer culture. This is a version of what Sara Ahmed calls stranger fetishism: 'the act of welcoming "the stranger" as the origin of difference produces the very figure of "the stranger" as the one who can be taken in.' (Ahmed 2000: 97)

But the difference they are said to introduce is not so much one of 'traditional' lifestyle, but, rather, a hybrid one. In other words, rather than fixed into ossified tradition, the Asian lifestyles are seen as intensely hybrid and elevated as emblems of the contemporary, postmodern world, and as such, will lead us into a promising future. Indeed, what struck me when I first saw Marr's television series, was how in contrast to earlier debates (in the sixties and seventies) about the unassimilable nature of Asians because of their 'backward' culture, South Asians are now celebrated as hybrid. Indeed, they are now cited as the most potent



'signifiers of the urban postmodern metropolitan experience!' (Hall 2000: 220) But while their cultures are no longer fixed, their bodies remain attached to Brick Lane and its surroundings, which are located within cosmo-multiculturalism's 'circuit of touristic capital' (Hage 1997 in Threadgold 2000: 198). The tourist-like experience of the 'foreign' and the 'exotic' is widely conceived as the prerogative of the white middle-class Briton, who moves between urban areas to have a taste of exoticism. Within the representational landscape of multicultural Britain, there is little room for the tourist-like experiences the immigrants themselves, for whom 'English' ways are most exotic and foreign (Threadgold 2000).

Rather, the men Marr introduces to the viewers 'compose a population whose tastes in food and art and whose creative knowledges [banghra, new-wave Indian food, Brit art] are [now] *easily assimilable* to the urges for commodity variation and [collective] self-improvement that already saturate the existing indigenous mass national "milieu".' (Berlant 1997: 195) Within the realm of 'consumer citizenship', where 'discourses of choice, responsibilities, rights and will have come to crystallise' (Cronin 2000: 152; see also Evans 1993), the Asians of Brick Lane, here, do not acquire rights and recognition through *buying* commodities, but rather through *selling* them. The Asian other is welcome by virtue of his capacity to sell his ethnicity, spice up the bland, retrograde life of traditional Britain. As Marr wanders the streets of Brick Lane, he remarks on how,

within a few hundred yards, you can journey from the old East End, with jellied eel and whelk stalls, elderly men in 1950s-style suites, junk shops stacked with old shellac records and moist, moulded furniture, to the London of the 2000s, with coldly trendy clothes shops, cutting-edge new Asian restaurants, impossibly fashionable cafés, and walls covered with Indian film posters. On busy days, the air is full of Bangladeshi, American, French and Asian voices. The massive old Truman Brewery has been bought by an Iraqi who is turning it into a set of new media, film PR, design and arts spaces, the cutting-edge businesses of modern London. (2000a: 158)

The culture produced by the new-wave Asians and Iraqis provides the path to the future of multi-ethnic Britain. The future is here, *not* in the working class 'old East End'. The problem of immigration is turned into the problem of object, bland, musty and retrograde, working class Britain. An advocate of liberal meritocracy and a devout believer in the importance of economic strength, Marr leaves out the 'left out', white and Asian, worrying instead about persuading 'the *best* people in the Asian and Chinese communities to stay rather than go to the US', meaning immigrant investors such as 'the richest, most dynamic Hong Kong Chinese' (2000a; 156; my emphasis). He concedes, as quoted earlier, that 'Yes, of course, the "migrant city" represented by Brick Lane . . . has many dark corners . . . But other groups of the new British have been fantastically successful' (2000c).

I emerged from reading Marr's celebration of New England feeling, like Jon Snow, 'that the expanding middle classes are going to have a great old time, but that the unemployed and ill-educated can expect nothing.' (*Guardian Unlimited* 06.02.00)[xxiii]. More pointedly, by displacing the problem of multiculturalism from the immigrants to the working classes, Marr is seeking out a subject to be accountable for the slow progress into the fantasised international, multicultural Britain. This is a Britain where ethnic differences dissolved under the promise of universal inclusiveness, which consists of an unmarked middle-class. This version of cosmo-multiculturalism is not so much without migrants as it is without classes. As Chris Haylett (2001) points out, in this "modern multicultural" [Britain], there is no legitimate space for class-based discourses' (2001: 364; I would add gender as well). Moreover, she argues that the white working classes have become a symbol of 'generalised backwardness', and a burden to the middle-classes who seek to move and shake Britain into the 21 century. In light of Marr's exclusive version of inclusive Britain, I would suggest that it is not only the white working classes who are the burden, but all working classes who do not cater to the desires of the consuming middle-classes.[xxiv] The

representative middle class is positioned at the vanguard of "the modern" which becomes a moral category referring to liberal, cosmopolitan, work and consumption based lifestyles and values, and the "unmodern" on which this category depends is



*the . . . working-class “other”, emblematically a throwback to other times and places.
(Haylett 2001: 365)*

There is assuredly a necessary relation between the excluded and the representative middle-class, one that would merit further investigation. Equally important, however, is precisely the ways in which class and ethnicity intersect in the formation of ideas of the ‘unmodern’, ‘traditional’, or ‘backward’. As suggested earlier, the agents of the internationalisation of Britain that Marr celebrates compose a population whose *work* for the national self-improvement is concealed under the cloak of taste (in food and art) and creative knowledges (in music, the Net, and in financial trading).

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I examine positive discourses of multiculturalism, at a time when Britain is widely recognised as a multicultural nation. I discuss what happens to the definition of ‘national culture’ when ‘minority cultures’ are not only let in, but redefined as integral to the nation itself (Ahmed 2000: 97). I also seek to unveil the kinds of national, multicultural subjects produced in this new national landscape.

In the examples discussed here, encounters with people ‘like us’ from other parts of the world involve both differentiation and homogenisation in the very production of New Britain. While the differentiation is unmarked in the generation of the face of Britain, the displays of pride as well as Andrew Marr’s ‘new British’ speak of a universal national ‘we’ by translating how ‘they’ live (but don’t struggle) here into a ‘we’ that speaks ‘our’ national pride (Ahmed 2000: 173). The formation of the new multicultural subjects involves a movement that oscillates between closeness and distance; that is, one which means that the other is now integral to ‘our’ imagined community, while at the same time, their strangeness, which is necessary to the project of multicultural Britain, keeps them distant and indeterminate. As such, they are expected to reiterate their allegiance to Britishness and their pride in the nation.

But there is also a similar oscillation in the very formation of the national subjects of pride. The convention of the liberal public sphere which requires the smudging of the lines between public and private subjectivities, and relies on the denial of any discontinuity between the voluntaristic self and legal personhood, turns on its head within a multiculturalist project based on a politics of recognition. Indeed, the multicultural subjects examined here are primarily public figures, yet whose particularity is marked through bodily features. In the multiculturalist public sphere, I would argue, speech is more legitimate as it becomes more attached to *some* bodies and detached from others.

In addition, the hailing of ‘visible minorities’, in Marr’s phrase, as speaking, voluntaristic selves simultaneously produces them as wilful subjects, thus opening up the possibility of disidentification. Hence the repeated acts of hailing the multicultural subjects – by asking them to testify, blending them in a universal collective self, or celebrating their lifestyles and hidden work – simultaneously produces them as ‘other’, as undeniably ‘different’ and ‘the same’ at the same time. It is not ‘their’ culture which is naturalised in the process: this culture, and their identity, emerge as intensely flexible and malleable. What is naturalised is the legitimacy and belonging of the unmarked subjects whose right to dwell, and whose attachment to the nation go unquestioned. The formless national subject is formless only by virtue of it being unmarked, which is a different to, though related with, the process of separation. The omnipresent absent and unlocated figure of the white Briton hovers in the background, a silent and secure witness to the testifying ‘other’, gazing back at you from her/his spooky genderless indeterminacy, or gazing delectably at the exotic and creative tastes of the migrants’ city. If the new Asian subjects in Marr’s new Britain can move between cultures, or morph/melt into hybrid forms, they are also less mobile, assigned to communities, and social and geographical locations, where they stay put to greet the visiting multicultural tourists.

Finally, a word on temporality imposes itself. The three imaginings of multiculturalism respectively move through three different temporalities – the past, present, and future. The pride politics sprung out of the celebration of Britain’s history, as an attempt to salvage it from



a perceived threat. The face of Britain is decidedly located in the present, while Andrew Marr speculates on what the future holds for Britain and for its 'visible minorities'. These should be read as a simultaneous 'events' that extend into each other, rather than an organized sequence that composes a unilinear narrative about the birth and death of Britain. Yet more could be said about the intersections of temporalities as well, for example with regards to the claimed migrant origins of the nation. This, and many other related issues, undoubtedly open up onto other intricacies of the recent reimaginings of the British national community.

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[i] I have received useful feedback from the audience on the two occasions where I presented earlier drafts of this paper: the European Sociological Association conference in Helsinki (09.01), and the Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths' College, London (11.01). I am grateful for the comments and suggestions from Les Back, Maureen McNeil, I also greatly appreciate Jennie Germann Molz's wonderful work on the archive used for this analysis (see note 2).

[ii] Thanks to the financial support of Lancaster University, an electronic newspaper archive on multicultural Britain has been compiled for the period of October 2000 – when the controversial Parekh Report was published – to May 2001. Jennie Germann Molz did an excellently thorough job of compiling and setting up the archive.

[iii] Feminist and postcolonial critiques, amongst others, have discussed Taylor's theory (Ahmed 2000; Bhabha 1996; Fraser 1997; Hesse 1999; Nicholson 1996) Surely a scrutiny of the Parekh Report's own version of a politics of recognition for Britain would be worth developing. Other noteworthy elements of the report include its definition of 'community' as an ethnic, local and moral community. According to the Parekh Report, British national subjects are aligned to one or more communities, which in turn are formed through the movements of individual bodies. The report's conception of 'nation', as manifested in the statement used as the epitaph of this article, would also warrant attention. Why would multiculturalism lead to the demise of the nation, to a 'post-nation'? It is still widely assumed, in social and cultural theory, that the contemporary global, transnational world is destroying the modern nation. In contrast,



I would argue that reconstitution of Britain as multicultural is deeply embedded within a national project. Further examination of the ways in which Britain is seeking to acquire a dominant position on the international stage as a leading multicultural nation, is but one simple example of how its current reincarnation as multicultural is motivated by nationalistic aims. I briefly return to this and other related points, later in this article.

[iv] I follow Stuart Hall in his distinction between 'multiculture' – or 'the multicultural' – and 'multiculturalism', where the 'multi-cultural' is used adjectivally. It describes the social characteristics and problems of governance posed by any society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their "original" identity. By contrast, "multiculturalism" is substantive. It references the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up.' (Hall 2000: 209). In other words, 'The multicultural is a signifier of the unsettled meanings of cultural differences in relation to multiculturalism as the signified of attempts to fix their meaning in national imaginaries.' (Hesse 2000: 2). I also use the adjective 'multiculturalist' to qualify people, or systems of thought, who follow the managerial precepts of multiculturalism.

[v] See Hage 1998 Chapter 4 on the 'stew' metaphor in multicultural Australia).

[vi] Such as in the following: '[The report] says the description of its inhabitants as British "will never do on its own", largely because the term has "racist connotations".' (The Daily Telegraph 10.10.00)

[vii] I do not want to contest that indeed in contemporary Britain, there are blacks in the Union Jack. In addition, and following Judith Butler (1990, 1993), it could be argued that the repeated declarations of pride in being black or Asian and British might serve to open-up the signifier 'British' and to undermine the assumed naturalness of Britishness-as-whiteness. Iteration is indeed a practice 'whereby the political signifier is perpetually resignified' (Butler 1993: 220), reworking prior signifiers into the promise of the new, opening up the signifier 'as a site of rearticulations that is the discursive occasion for hope.' (Butler 1993: 219). We should not underestimate the potentially transformative effects of the repeated declarations of pride by people of colour on established conceptions of Britishness. But Butler's theory also disallows any either-or conception of identity formation. Hence, as I argue later, the very insistence on displaying the pride of these particular subjects suggests that they might already be suspect of disidentification. By the same token, the naturalness of Britishness-as-whiteness is reinforced.

[viii] I shall briefly return to the opposition between the good and the bad patriot in the third section. But given the focus of this essay on positive representations of multicultural Britain, I do not elaborate on latter, which would warrant a close scrutiny on the ways in which the white, working class male figure embodies the ugly face of racism and patriotism in Britain.

[ix] A requirement that again unites thinkers from the whole political spectrum. Hugo Young, columnist in the 'progressive-leftist' Guardian, wrote that 'Perhaps the trouble for British Muslims as a community is that not enough of these uncomfortable questions [of religious and national allegiance] have been asked of them. "Multi-culturalism" gives them shelter from decisions about allegiance that the events of 11/9 can no longer allow to be postponed.' (The Guardian 6.11.01)

[x] This is a claim made by the press, not by Dorley-Brown or representatives from Haverhill. Nick Keeble, from Haverhill Town Council, says that Haverhill's population includes only 2 to 2.5 percent of ethnic minorities (personal conversation, November 2001).

[xi] Lauren Berlant (1997) and Donna Haraway (1997) have both written about a similar national figure produced by Time, in 1993. The 'New Face of America' was also the result of morphing technology, and was released in a similar context of assessing a new future in relation to a multicultural present. The issue at stake in the imagining of both figures as national faces was explicitly stated in the US version, while it is implicit, I suggest, in the UK one. That is: 'the necessary adaptation all white Americans [and Britons] must make to the



new multicultural citizenship norm' (Berlant 1997: 200). Berlant's and Haraway's analyses have provided a model for my reading of 'the face of Britain'.

[xii] Digital morphing was used in films such as *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991), and famously in Michael Jackson's video *Black or White* (1991). See Wolf 2000 for 'A brief history of Morphing'.

[xiii] I am thinking, for example, of the work of the 'National Heritage' project set up by Mongrel, an international collective of artists who used new technologies to produce socially engaged and critical cultural productions, and to 'celebrate the methods of an "ignorant" and "filthy" London street culture.' One of the results of the Heritage Project was a series of composite bruised skin-masks, each of which appearing in various hues. A grey head-dress, a pair of eyes that come in different shapes, and a mouth, are literally attached to the skin-mask. The mask seemingly fills a hole in the head-dress which is stitched to the skin-mask all around the latter's outer edge. Eyes and a mouth are stitched onto the mask as well. Finally, the photograph itself appears stained, or not quite dry with remaining spots of chemical solution. Hence the finished product is a far cry from Dorley-Brown's polished photograph. (Mongrel 1998; Mongrel Project 1998) I am grateful to Nina Wakeford for drawing my attention to this project.

[xiv] It is worth noting that a set of postcards were also produced as a result of the Haverhill project. Each postcard is a not-so-neat morph from a different age group, where the juxtaposition of the faces is more visible, and where details such as skin tone, wrinkles, and so on, are retained.

[xv] This contrasts clearly from the 'face of America' (see note 8), which is explicitly described on the Time front cover as the creation 'by computer of a mix of several races' (in Berlant 1997: 200). Inside the magazine, a series of photographs are organised into a seven-by-seven square according to ethnic types: 'Middle Eastern', 'Italian', 'African', 'Vietnamese', 'Anglo-Saxon', 'Chinese', 'Hispanic'. In a manner akin to multiplication tables, with female faces in the horizontal axis, and male face in the vertical one, the reader can 'morph' the images together to produce different offsprings. (in Berlant 1997: 204).

[xvi] Chris Dorley-Brown is presently preparing a similar project involving 20 000 people in London. (personal communication).

[xvii] Some readers might recognise John Redwood's (1999) book title in this subheading, but the analogy stops here. I do not discuss this publication in this essay. The title of this section is meant to reflect Andrew Marr's book title, as well as to mark a dramatic distinction between Marr's celebration of the death of a Britain that is honoured in the pride politics discussed above.

[xviii] Thanks to Maureen McNeil for drawing my attention to this connection.

[xix] In the books published in 1990s and early 2000s only, male authors include Malcom Billings (1991), Norman (1999), Simon Heffer (1999), Andrew Marr (2000), Tom Nairn (2000), Jeremy Paxman (1998), Roger Scruton (2000), Idries Shah (2000), to name a few. I have come across only three books by women: Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2000), Linda Cooley (1992), and Lynne Pearce (2000). Television productions on the identity of Britain are equally the product of male endeavours. They include: *How Racist is Britain?* (2001); Simon Schama's *History of Britain* (2000), Darcus Howe's *The White Tribe* (1999), and Marr's own television version of *The Day Britain Died* (2000).

[xx] Of course, the present war against terrorism has brought political and military strength to the foreground of Britain's self-affirmation as a leading world nation. In this context, as stated earlier, the formerly embraced Asian Muslim is now called upon to testify his allegiance to the nation.

[xxi] The mapping of multicultural Britain reproduces a clear dichotomy between metropolitan centre and 'the regions' which would merit closer attention, namely with regards to the imagined relationship between them.

[xxii] Personal conversation.



[xxiii] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3959485,00.html> [accessed 4.10.01]

[xxiv] An scrutiny of the coverage of the racial riots in the summer of 2001 might be enlightening in this respect.