



# Race, Racism and Development

Interrogating History,  
Discourse and Practice

Kalpana Wilson

## About the author

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KALPANA WILSON is a Fellow at the Gender Institute, London School of Economics. Her experience teaching development studies in British universities, as well as her involvement as an activist around issues of racism and imperialism, led her to pursue the themes of this book. She has also written and researched extensively on agrarian transformation in Bihar in India, women's participation in rural labour movements and the relationships between neoliberalism, gender and concepts of agency.

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*Interrogating history, discourse and practice*

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# Introduction

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I was in the last stages of completing this book in March 2012 when the ‘Kony 2012’ video went viral. The video and the responses it generated seemed to highlight many of the questions I had been thinking and writing about over the preceding months. Produced by the US-based NGO Invisible Children, the video was part of a campaign for the arrest of Ugandan Joseph Kony, the leader of the armed group the Lord’s Resistance Army, and his trial by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, in particular the abduction of thousands of children as soldiers. The video called for US military intervention in Central Africa to be stepped up in order to ‘Stop Kony’ and targeted young people in the global North to join a mass movement demanding this action.

Less than three weeks after being uploaded to the Internet, ‘Kony 2012’ had been viewed by more than 84 million people, and had already generated intense controversy. Many commentators highlighted the fact that the video was heavily oversimplified and referred to a situation which had since changed drastically – Kony was no longer active in Uganda, and, it was argued, resources were more urgently needed to help ex-child soldiers to rebuild their lives than for the mission of capturing him. Perhaps most tellingly, although this was less widely circulated in the mainstream media, fear from being reluctant to sustain a military presence in the region as the video suggests, the US administration had ongoing military involvement and significant strategic and economic interests in the area bordering Uganda and the DRC (where Kony had now fled), not least because of the existence of significant oil resources which are already being exploited by North American and British companies.

Meanwhile, other writers focused on the racism implicit in ‘Kony 2012’, which was seen as reproducing colonial narratives about Africa in which white people are constructed as having a moral obligation to intervene to rescue and ‘save’ black people from chaos, violence and irrationality. Although the video is ostensibly about children in Uganda, the emotional core of the film is in fact the scene in which the white American film-maker Jason Russell shows his 5-year-old son a photograph of the ‘bad guy’ Joseph Kony, setting up a highly racialised dichotomy between the ‘evil’ black man and the innocent white child who, once he understands the all-too-simple problem, can help to ‘fix’ it.

But these two strands of criticism – of the role of global capital in producing the US military intervention the video supports, and of the role of ideas of ‘race’ and of racism in shaping the video – remained largely separate. The questions I would like to pose in this context relate to the connections between the two. What is the work that ideas of ‘race’ do here? Can we understand ‘Kony 2012’ as not simply reflecting latent racism, but mobilising it, and if so, to what ends? More broadly, how do we understand the ongoing relationship between ‘race’ and capital on a global scale? How does racism inform and legitimise changing patterns of exploitation, exchange and accumulation? And how do these patterns, in turn, reproduce material inequalities which continue to be explained through a language of ‘race’?

In this book, which in many ways takes these questions as a starting point, I have sought to bring a critical understanding of ‘race’ and racism into the same frame as ‘development’, which I conceptualise as including not only the vast array of development organisations and initiatives but the

wider processes of economic, social and political change with which these are concerned.

The period when I first began teaching development studies in London more than a decade ago coincided with a phase when anti-racist activists in Britain were rethinking the contours of racism in the changed circumstances of the 'War on Terror'. More than ever, it was felt to be imperative to seek to understand racism as it was experienced and confronted in Britain in the context of imperialism and the changing strategies of global capital. The changes under way had begun well before 9/11, however, with the advent of neoliberal globalisation and, from the 1990s onwards, the rise of new civilisational discourses and the construction of new 'threats', which were racialised in ways both novel and familiar.

With the invasion of Iraq following on rapidly from the occupation of Afghanistan, the tone of apologists for Britain's colonial history became increasingly celebratory. Simultaneously, the notion of 'development' increasingly appeared in public pronouncements in the context of military intervention, combating terrorism, preventing migration and securing populations in the global North – a set of linkages which were to crystallise in the development/security paradigm according to which, as Tony Blair put it, 'the yearning is for order and stability and if it doesn't exist elsewhere, it is unlikely to exist here'.

In a couple of decades, 'development' as it was popularly understood in Britain had acquired dramatically increased visibility and a whole range of new meanings. These meanings were embodied in the figure of the development worker – almost always the employee of an NGO, but with increasingly dense connections with northern militaries on the one hand and corporates on the other who appeared in different guises: morally compelled to 'take sides' on the frontline of war zones in Africa, embedded in military intervention to protect human rights in the Middle East, and teaching people everywhere in the global South about civilisational 'values' like democracy, gender equality and entrepreneurialism – and they were meanings which, as I argue in this book, were always, also implicitly about race. Yet race and racism remained an area of profound silence in development studies, a silence which was all the more weighted by the fact that experiences of learning and teaching were structured by power-laden encounters between academics, the overwhelming majority of whom, still, were white, and a very diverse range of students, many of whom had travelled from countries in the global South to acquire the qualifications which would mark them as having the skills required to work in development.

I argue that the ideas of 'race' and of development have in fact been intimately related from the consolidation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards, but that the relationship between the two has changed significantly in different historical periods. To understand this, I suggest, we need to treat development as not simply encompassing institutions which are avowedly engaged in international development – government departments like DfID or USAID, international organisations like the World Bank, or development NGOs – even though there is so much to be said about 'race' and racism within these institutions. Rather, development should be understood more broadly as incorporating the whole complex of unequal material relationships and processes which structure engagement between the global South and the global North, as well as the primary discursive framework within which these relationships have been constructed for more than sixty years. It is therefore inextricable from the rapidly shifting and mutating operations of global capital, and should be understood in relation to concepts of imperialism, rather than, as in much development discourse, as an alternative which renders these concepts invisible.

In the process of making these connections, three recurring analytical themes have emerged. The first relates to my preoccupation with tracing the relationship between race and capital. I argue that



constructions of race and racial hierarchy (explicit or implicit) are reconfigured and redeployed both in response to resistance to capital which threatens to transform radically the distribution of power and resources, and in the context of often related shifts in patterns and strategies of global capital accumulation. This is explored and elaborated, for example, in the context of the uprisings of 1857 in India and the decades that followed; in the context of resistance to neoliberal economic policies and the good governance agenda of the 1990s; and in Britain during the contemporary War on Terror.

The second theme involves exploring what the materiality of race might mean in the context of global structures of capital and processes of accumulation. Questions of the body and embodied experience, the material production of difference, and how these are shaped by racial ideologies emerge as central from discussion of development policies and interventions such as those relating to (or impacting upon) population control, HIV, famine and malnutrition, and are elaborated further in [Chapter 6](#) in particular.

The third theme relates to the tendency of discourses of development to appropriate and incorporate critical approaches. This has been particularly marked, I argue, since the advent of neoliberalism as the dominant model of development. The means by which elements of both postdevelopment and postcolonial critiques have been, apparently paradoxically, incorporated within neoliberal frameworks is examined at a number of points in the book. In these contexts, I reflect on the implications for the theorisation of race in development and for the politics of transnational solidarity.

## **Theorising race and development**

If 'race' in development is an arena of silence, it is at the same time a theme that precipitates engagement with a very rich variety of work by scholars and activists. In particular, three interrelated and overlapping kinds of analytical work have inspired and informed this book: Marxist theorisation of imperialism, and in particular 'Third World' Marxism or the diverse approaches to revolutionary theory and practice which have been developed in, and with reference to, the global South (though evidently extends beyond the work of the dependency theorists usually cited in histories of development thought); analysis of 'race' and racism as it operates within North American and European social formations, much of it broadly identified with critical race theory; and scholarship which is located within the avowedly diverse and porous analytical field of postcolonial theory.

The emergence and establishment of postcolonial theory has generated a sustained critical focus on discourses of development, the 'representations and institutional practices that structure the relationships between West and Third World' ([Kapoor, 2008](#): xv). The deconstruction of discourses of development and their role in regulating the 'Third World', in particular through processes of construction of the 'other' by way of a series of binary oppositions and strategic silencings, has formed the basis for much contemporary critical work around development. Crucially for thinking about race, it has challenged the construction of development as a neutral, 'technical' field, making possible to raise questions of power, difference, location and subjectivity. Not surprisingly, then, it is within a postcolonial theoretical framework that the relatively small body of existing work which directly addresses 'race' and racism in development is located.

But the postcolonial approach also leaves unanswered or even unaskable a number of questions which become particularly pressing in the context of the historical and contemporary relationships between race and development. For example, precisely what kinds of material arrangements and relationships underpin and are perpetuated by the discourses that postcolonial theorists deconstruct? It is not enough to speak, as much postcolonial theory does, of the overarching category of modernity as the

framework within which colonial discourses emerge, or do we need to distinguish the particular economic processes under way in different periods, and, critically, how these change and the implications of these changes? These are particularly salient questions when considering race, because the centrality of the idea of 'race' to Enlightenment thinking cannot be fully understood without foregrounding the enabling relationship between race and capital, and the accumulation from racialised slavery it allowed, which in turn made possible the establishment of European capitalism. Further, as I explore in this book, constructions of race have been repeatedly transformed, reworked and reanimated in the context of both changing strategies of capital accumulation and resistance to them. But because postcolonial approaches tend to regard all conceptions of economic development in poststructuralist terms, as metanarratives of progress, they often neglect the changes in patterns of global capital accumulation reflected in changing models of development, such as the shift from developmentalism to neoliberalism, and their implications for race. This approach also does not encourage us to consider the visions of different kinds of development which often inform resistance to capitalist accumulation processes, so that paradoxically those engaging in this resistance may be silenced in postcolonial literature.

As well as the key influence of Fanon, postcolonial theory has drawn directly and indirectly on the work of Foucault, whose thinking also informs much current critical scholarship in development studies which is not avowedly postcolonial. Foucauldian concepts of discourse, power/knowledge, disciplinary power and the production of the subject are all ones that I deploy repeatedly in the chapters that follow. At the same time, in incorporating these concepts within a broad framework of Marxist political economy, I also diverge from a Foucauldian perspective in a number of key respects, in particular in relation to Foucault's conceptualisation of power as circulating and pervasive, rather than located, which characterises his later work. This notion of power has often been adopted in ways which, I have argued, preclude a consideration of the sources of power, or examining its relationships to material structures of production, exchange and accumulation in any depth. Further, Foucauldian approaches to development, as I suggest later in the book, have tended to emphasise the regulation and management and containment of populations at the expense of attention to the dynamics of extractive and exploitative processes, thus limiting the possibilities for an exploration of the changing relationship between race and capital.

This is by no means to suggest that postcolonial and Marxist thinking can be distinguished by a simple discursive/material dichotomy, or indeed that they represent mutually exclusive systems of thought. Marx's own engagement with the role of discourse in sustaining power is evident in much of his work but is most fully elaborated in *The German Ideology*, in which he argues with reference to the ruling class that 'insofar ... as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age' (Marx and Engels, 1974: 64)

Nor am I arguing here that postcolonial theorists completely neglect material relations. Although postcolonial theorists have tended to emphasise discursive continuities with the colonial period, as other work influenced by poststructuralism, notably feminist theory, there has been a significant 'turn' to the material, particularly in relation to the body and space. This is particularly significant for discussions of race, and, as I indicate below, forms one of the elements on which I have drawn in order to explore questions of embodied difference in the context of development.

I have indicated some of the areas where the framework of postcolonial theory has seemed to me to be insufficient to address the questions of race, racism and development, even though many ideas

within it are invaluable for such a project. The central aspect of this, however, is the way postcolonial ideas have proved amenable to appropriation within neoliberal approaches to development. As I have suggested, neoliberalism has shown a remarkable capacity to incorporate and transform critical ideas. I explore this in detail in the context of the response to critiques of representations of Third World women and the foregrounding of notions of women's agency and empowerment within development in [Chapter 2](#), and elsewhere I look at how, more broadly, elements of postcolonial ideas about difference and hybridity as well as critiques of Eurocentrism have been incorporated into neoliberal development discourses such as those produced by the World Bank. This is partly made possible, I argue, by the prominence of notions of choice and of freedom within neoliberal discourses that are constructed as emancipatory narratives, primarily in relation to a state that is by definition oppressive. The specific and often fatally constrained and constraining meanings of these terms within this context, I suggest, can only be fully exposed by a political economy critique which not only establishes the shackling of these notions to the institutions of property and the capitalist market, but also demonstrates the day-to-day material effects of their operation.

Attempts to theorise 'race' and racism within a Marxist framework have, of course, had to challenge economic reductionist and essentialising interpretations of Marxism, in which lived experiences are seen as determined by the individual's relations to the means of production alone, and a consideration of, for example, racism among the white working class in countries of the global North is viewed as divisive and irrelevant. Yet, as Stuart Hall has argued, historical materialism as a method explicitly rejects this reductionism, allowing us to trace the relationship between racism and capitalism, and explore specific conjunctures of time and space in order to establish how this relationship has evolved in a variety of ways ([Hall, 1986](#)). As Hall explains in his exposition of the ideas of Gramsci, this involves 'not simply more detailed historical specification, but – as Gramsci himself argued – the application of new concepts and further levels of determination in addition to those pertaining to simple exploitative relations between capital and labour' ([1986](#): 7).

Hall has argued for an analytical focus on the social formation rather than the mode of production as the framework within which historical specificities can be explored at a more particular level and the possibility of the articulation of more than one mode of production within a single social formation can be acknowledged ([1986](#)). This approach has been important for Marxist-oriented scholarship on race and racism, generating influential concepts such as Omi and Winant's racial formation ([1986](#)). But the tendency to treat the social formation as a bounded category for analysis of race, which has characterised some critical race theory in the USA, raises questions about how to address the more extensive scope of imperialism, the contemporary operations of global capital, and neoliberal globalisation, questions which come to the fore in a consideration of race in development.

While remaining attentive to the inherent mutability of racial categories, as well as the ways in which experiences of racialisation are shaped by particular histories, I am concerned here to locate the ideas and the practices of race within processes taking place on a global scale, including not only the history of racialised slavery and European colonialism, but also 'neocolonial' Cold War economic and political and military relationships of power; the consolidation of global capital and of neoliberalism and the post-Cold War expansion of direct military intervention and the 'War on Terror', all of which have seen the deployment of a variety of concepts and practices of development. Rather than investigating the dynamics of particular racialised societies in the global South (for example, Brazil or South Africa), then, the book focuses attention on the racialised implications of development interventions taking place on a global scale – such as population control, or the good governance agenda, recognising that these cannot be fully grasped without a consideration of how they are

experienced, negotiated and contested in a variety of different contexts.

This recognition of imperialism as central to an understanding of race, wherever one is located, brings the book closer to some of the concerns of earlier radical critiques of racism, most notably those present in the later work of W.E.B. Du Bois. At the same time, in focusing on the changing material dynamics of imperialism, and relating it to structures of inequality and multiple struggles for social transformation in the global South, it draws extensively on the work of a wide range of 'Third World' Marxist scholars and activists who have sought to apply and extend Marxist ideas to further these struggles.

All of these strands of thinking, organising and struggling have shaped this book, and in particular the ways in which I attempt to think through the central question of the work race does. The starting point is that race is a social construct rather than a biological fact, a temporally and spatially contingent and mutable system of categorisation, only intelligible in terms of ideas of racial hierarchy. At the same time, as Linda Martín Alcoff puts it, 'race is real': it is lived experience (2001). It shapes material structures of power and distribution of resources, and regulates bodies and spaces. This second aspect is, of course, less acknowledged within dominant discourses about race than the first, because it is much more threatening to existing contemporary structures of power and control of resources.<sup>1</sup>

But the book's focus on the global inequalities that are central to questions of development makes me want to look in more depth at the relationship between race and material processes. Contemporary theorising around racialised embodiment has drawn on ideas developed in the context of feminist theory that focused on the indeterminacy of the embodied subject which is repeatedly reproduced in contingent ways. Yet looking at race in relation to global capital complicates this, while further reinforcing the central fact that the differences of race are socially produced, not biological. As I argue in [Chapter 6](#), this perspective highlights how the 'idea of race' legitimized and made possible processes which produced bodies differently in material ways related to access to and control over, or violent denial of – resources, such as for example land, or health care. At the same time, these processes are sites of ongoing contestation and resistance, which also has corporeal implications. Considering embodiment, I suggest that we need to consider not only the discursive production of racialised bodies but equally the racialised material production of bodies. This shift also has a bearing on the apparent contradiction of thinking about the work race does on a global scale, while recognising that for many people in the world race as a category for subject formation may have little meaning.

The emphasis on the global implications of constructions of race and of racism, and specifically on the relationship between global capital and race, requires some explanation. This does not imply that the ever-expanding scale of global capital accumulation has a homogenising effect: rather, as I have argued, capitalism is productive of difference, and this continues to be evident in the context of neoliberalism, which frequently sustains, intensifies and incorporates pre-existing inequalities, such as those of gender, caste or ethnic group. The multiplicity of experiences and relationships in different global locations and the extent of the differences between them cannot be underestimated – and processes of racialised essentialisation such as those which have produced the tropes of the 'Third World woman as victim' have been the focus of some of the most influential postcolonial critiques of development, notably those of Chandra Mohanty (1986) and Gayatri Spivak (1988). But more recently, reflecting on the influence and interpretation of her article 'Under Western Eyes', first published in 1986, Mohanty has called attention to the potentially paralysing effects of an emphasis on difference, which elides analysis of wider transnational structures of capital and therefore limits the possibilities for a radical politics of solidarity that remains attentive to difference ([Mohanty](#)



2003). I would suggest that work which contributes to such a politics must not only engage with the operations of global processes, as I have outlined above, but attempt, at least provisionally, to make links and trace connections transnationally between vastly different historical and spatial contexts. While clearly such an approach has inherent risks of simplification and misrepresentation, I would argue that these risks are outweighed by the potential insights to be gained.

For example, although the empirical focus of the book is on more recent historical periods, I refer to the events of the Haitian Revolution – which overturned the meaning of race as an idea at the very moment when it was being consolidated – drawing upon the extremely rich and varied accounts and analysis of those scholars and writers who have studied it in depth. The Revolution and the question of race, capital, labour and freedom at its heart have, I suggest, inescapable implications for the central themes of this book. Further, the exclusion of these seminal events from many mainstream accounts of the period only testifies to the enduring effects of racism, and is a process with which there must be no further collusion.

Inevitably perhaps, this book has left me with more questions than it has answered, and many of its conclusions are simultaneously appeals for further engagement, exploration and elaboration. While it is customary to begin with a ‘theoretical’ chapter which introduces the relevant existing literature and then move on to the presentation of empirical material, this book is structured slightly differently, reflecting my commitment to a dialectical and reflexive approach which questions the theory/practice dichotomy that is so ingrained in development, as well as the fact that the book in many ways represents an unfinished journey towards theorising ‘race’ and racism in the context of development.

The starting point in [Chapter 1](#), then, is an exploration of the historical and conceptual roots of the ideas of development and progress in the emergence of European capitalism, and how they were related to the consolidation of constructions of ‘race’ in the contexts of slavery and colonialism which made this emergence possible. The chapter goes on to look at how changing patterns of imperial accumulation and multiple forms of resistance to these processes reshaped and reconfigured constructions of ‘race’ in the nineteenth century, and set the parameters for future development interventions, through a focus on a key moment in this process: the Indian uprisings of 1857 and the protracted aftermath. In [Chapter 2](#), the question of racialised representations and the impact on them of changing strategies of capital accumulation is explored further, in the context of contemporary neoliberal globalisation. This chapter examines changing gendered and racialised visual representations of ‘poor women in the global South’ by development institutions, looking critically at new racialised constructions of the empowered, agentic entrepreneurial subject through a discussion of three recent publicity campaigns, each belonging to a different strand within the development industry.

The next three chapters examine how ‘race’ and racism are implicated in particular development policies that have been pursued at specific historical conjunctures. [Chapter 3](#) examines population control policies in the context of the Cold War, the reconfiguring of imperialism after formal colonialism, and the challenge to the existing global distribution of wealth and resources posed by communist movements in the global South, and explores how these were related to the pathologisation of racialised sexualities which mark discourses of population control. Continuing with this theme, [Chapter 4](#) looks at the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa, which has mirrored the trajectory of neoliberal policies introduced in the 1980s, examining how the operation of ‘race’ and racism have shaped both the pandemic and the changing responses to it. [Chapter 5](#) focuses on the 1990s as a decade in which ‘race’ was mobilized in new ways which both evoke and extend earlier deployments. It explores this mobilisation in relation to three interlinked processes that spanned the decade: the shift

from 'needs-based' to 'rights-based' approaches to humanitarian intervention; the emergence of the good governance agenda; and the reconfiguration of the relationship between development and liberal democracy within dominant discourses. Both this chapter and the one that precedes it highlight the continuing centrality of racialised and pathologising tropes of 'Africa' to development intervention which not only renders invisible the heterogeneity of the continent and its multiple trajectories and histories, but operates to reinscribe and extend global relationships of inequality and exploitation.

The last three chapters focus directly upon different strands of critical thinking about development and their implications. Building on the earlier chapters, they move towards a possible theorisation of 'race' and racism in development. [Chapter 6](#) discusses recent critical analysis of the development/security paradigm associated with twenty-first-century neoliberal imperialism, and drawing on feminist, postcolonial and Marxist approaches to the body, looks at the implications for analysing contemporary race and racialisation of bringing questions of embodiment, labour, land and capital accumulation into the frame. [Chapter 7](#) examines racialised constructions within postdevelopment approaches, and, through a reflection on some aspects of an international campaign against bauxite mining in India, considers the extent to which postdevelopment ideas have been selectively appropriated within the neoliberal project, particularly in the context of the activities of NGOs, and explores the implications for practices of transnational political solidarity. It discusses the increasing construction of Northern publics as powerful collective agents with moral and civilisation obligations to intervene in the global South, a process that is evident in the 'Kony 2012' campaign with which we began this discussion. [Chapter 8](#) continues with the theme of appropriation, considering in particular those postcolonial critiques of development which have directly addressed 'race' and racism. The chapter examines the initiative of the British government's Department for International Development (DfID) to involve diasporas in development, along with some wider representations of the role of 'diasporic' subjects in development in the British media, in the context of contemporary reconfigurations of 'race' within Britain, which are both shaped by and in turn affect the multiple trajectories of neoliberal imperialism and the resistance it generates.

## Race, capital and resistance through the lens of 1857

You may hang me, or such as me, every day but thousands will rise in my place and your object will never be gained.

Pir Ali, a bookbinder from Patna  
hanged by the British in 1857

This chapter looks at the historical and conceptual roots of the ideas of development and progress, the emergence of European capitalism, and how they were related to the consolidation and the constructions of 'race' in the contexts of slavery and colonialism, which made this emergence possible. It will then consider how both changing patterns of imperial accumulation and multiple forms of resistance to these processes reshaped and reconfigured constructions of 'race' in the nineteenth century, setting the parameters for future development interventions, through a focus on one of a number of key moments in this process: the Indian uprisings of 1857 and their aftermath. By looking at the events of 1857 through the lens of some of the debates which surrounded them on the 150th anniversary, we will also reflect on some continuities in the relationships between 'race', capital, and the discourses, structures and practices of development.

Drawing on the extensive critical theorising around race which has informed challenges to racialised power in multiple locations, I treat 'race' as simultaneously a socially constructed, historically contingent and mutable category, and a material reality which shaped and constrained, often fatally, embodied and lived experience, and continues to do so in changing ways. Race, therefore, cannot be understood simply as a legitimating ideology for capitalist accumulation, or even, in more Foucauldian terms, as a discourse of disciplinary power for categorising subjects and facilitating colonial regulation. It became a system of organising capital accumulation, and as a result its implications were not limited to naming difference and giving it material effects. Racialised capitalism in the late colonial form it took from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, I suggest, was productive of material and embodied difference on a global scale, most centrally through the systematic dispossession of working people in the global South of the resources needed to sustain human life.

This period saw the consolidation of a global division of labour in which vast regions of the global South became primarily suppliers of raw materials and food grains for European industrial centres. As we will see, everywhere this relationship was established not primarily through the operation of 'free market' processes but through direct interventions by the colonial state marked by violence, coercion and repression. This period saw the decisive divergence in the standards of living of the producing classes in the North and the South which has been called the 'creation of the Third World' (Davidson 2001), and the increasing externalisation of the phenomena of chronic hunger, large-scale destitution and recurrent famine from Europe to its colonies.

As I argue here, these global processes, on the one hand, demanded and were strengthened by the new so-called 'scientific racism' of Social Darwinism with its emphasis on racial hierarchies of evolution. On the other hand, they put in place economic structures which produced and reproduced the embodied difference implied by marked global inequalities. The experience of chronic

undernutrition and its accompanying effects on the immune system, for example, shaped subjectivity but was also reproduced through intergenerational processes. These experiences are contingent on a number of interlinked axes of inequality – class and gender in particular – as well as global location. But these embodied differences were in turn racialised, as poverty and destitution were discursively decoupled from colonial processes of appropriation and accumulation, and essentialised as products of the innate inertia and passivity of the colonised, which directly contrasted with European dynamism and industry. Of the many interlinked oppositions that have characterised racial discourse, it was arguably this dichotomy between poverty-stricken apathy and prosperous dynamism which was most intimately related to the development enterprise, and provided its underlying logic.

Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton (1995, 1996) have traced the emergence of the concept of ‘development’ in Western thought to the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe. In a departure from earlier theories of societal change as cyclical, with capitalism and the possibility of accumulation on an ever-expanding scale had come the idea that there could be constant ‘progress’. Development came to be seen as the means through which the bourgeoisie ‘entrusted’ with it would bring ‘order’ to the otherwise chaotic and potentially dangerous progress (Cowen and Shenton, 1995: 34); as an idea that was a product of the fear of the powerless by the powerful, and specifically the anxieties among the rising bourgeoisie generated by the ‘dangerous classes’, the dispossessed who were drawn to the industrialising cities but were yet to be disciplined by capital. For Cowen and Shenton, the notion of ‘trusteeship’ was central to the idea of intentional development, which implied an ‘external authority of development’ that would regulate the internal ‘immanent’ development of capitalist production. They contrast this with Marx’s idea of an ‘expanded domain of development’ whose source is not capital but the potential embodied in human ‘capacities to create and imagine if freed from the dictates of production’ and which encompassed ‘the potential for universal freedom’ (Cowen and Shenton, 1996: xii).

However, the notion of constant progress itself was defined in counterpoint to the non-European societies whose resources provided the basis for European capitalism through the processes of slavery and colonialism. Reproducing the racialised binaries of passive/active and emotional/rational, the societies were constructed as stagnant, either lacking history altogether in the case of Africa (Goldberg, 1993; Mbembe, 2001) or fundamentally corrupt and in permanent ‘decline’ in the case of the ‘Orient’ (Said, 1978; Sangari and Vaid, 1989). Only under the direction of benevolent colonial rulers, therefore, could they achieve progress. Thus development had a different though related implication outside Europe, where, rather than regulating and controlling immanent processes, the trustees of development considered themselves responsible for bringing progress itself.

These racialised notions of ‘trusteeship’ (later to be immortalised as Kipling’s ‘white man’s burden’)<sup>1</sup> and the concept of the civilising mission thus deeply influenced the elaboration of ‘development’ ideas, which in turn were used to legitimise and perpetuate colonial rule, and particularly in the twentieth century, to counter the demands of anti-colonial movements.

## **‘Race’, capital and freedom**

The central role of transatlantic slavery and early colonialism, and of the huge transfer of resources from the global North involved in these processes, in creating the conditions for the development of capitalism in Europe has been established in extensive work by political economists. In analysing the impact of the enslavement and transportation of millions of people, the direct appropriation of resources, the extraction of surpluses through taxation, exploitation and unequal trade, and the shifting



of resources away from productive activities and enforced deindustrialisation, all of which accompanied European incursions, these writers have also demonstrated the inseparable economic relation between the development of capitalism in the global North and the structures and conditions associated with what are now called ‘developing’ countries in the global South.<sup>2</sup>

With the restructuring of Western societies associated with the transition to metropolitan industrial capitalism, liberal Enlightenment ideas about freedom, the rights of the individual and universal humanism became increasingly important. As Susan Buck-Morss writes, by the eighteenth century

slavery had become the root metaphor of Western political philosophy, connoting everything that was evil about power relations ... Yet this political metaphor began to take root at precisely the time that the economic practice of slavery – the systematic, highly sophisticated capitalist enslavement of non-Europeans as a labor force in the colonies – was increasing quantitatively and intensifying qualitatively to the point that by the mid-eighteenth century it came to underwrite the entire economic system of the West. (2000: 821)

Enlightenment ideas were clearly inconsistent with the dynamics of colonialism – and in particular with the system of transatlantic slavery – on which continuing capital accumulation depended, as they were with the continuation, or consolidation, of patriarchal gender relations within capitalism. Not surprisingly, then, Enlightenment ‘universalism’ was from the outset based on multiple exclusions with only the white, property-owning man ultimately defined as capable of ‘rational’ thought and action and therefore fully human and entitled to rights (Jaggar, 1988; Goldberg, 1993; Eze, 2000) reflecting what Sherene Razack calls the ‘paradox of liberalism’: ‘all human beings are equal and are entitled to equal treatment; those that are not entitled to equality are simply evicted from the category human’ (Razack, 2004: 40). In this context, as Paul Gilroy writes, there is a ‘need to indict those forms of rationality which have been rendered implausible by their racially exclusive character and further too explore their complicity with terror systematically and rationally practiced as a form of political and economic administration’ (Gilroy, 1993: 220).

Influential liberal philosophers such as Locke and Hume were explicitly racist in their writing defining black people as lacking the capacity for rationality and therefore agency (Goldberg, 1993; Eze, 1997, 2000). It was in this period that discourses of ‘race’ came to be structured around a set of binary oppositions (such as civilisation/savagery, reason/emotion and culture/nature), which characterised Enlightenment definitions of the human (Hall, 1994) and indeed, as we will see, continued to structure discourses of development even much later, when constructions of ‘cultural difference’ replaced explicit references to ‘race’ (Kothari, 2006). These claims by liberal thinkers were not, however, simply philosophical speculations but direct interventions into contemporary political debates (Eze, 2000) and, crucially, responses to the multiple forms of continuous and sustained resistance by the enslaved people themselves. They sought to provide a justification for plantation slavery as a form of surplus accumulation and its institutionalisation in forms such as France’s *Code Noir*, which applied to black slaves in its colonies (James, 1938) and ‘legalized not only slavery, the treatment of human beings as moveable property, but the branding, torture, physical mutilation, and killing of slaves for attempting to defy their inhuman status’ (Buck-Morss, 2000: 380). As this implies, the invention of ‘race’ was itself from the outset conditioned by the resistance of those it sought to exclude from humanity. Plantation slavery, however, can be understood not as an anomaly of capitalism but as its epitome, in which race makes possible the full commodification and therefore non-integrity of the body, which is ‘fully opened to capital’ (Cherniavsky, 2006: xvii). Revealed here are the interconnections of liberalism, ‘race’ and capital in lived experiences, one of the overarching themes of this book and one to which we will return in detail, particularly in Chapter 6.

Yet the racialised conceptualisation of notions of freedom and human rights was from the

inception a site of resistance and contestation. The Haitian Revolution, which began with a massive uprising by slaves in the French colony of Saint-Domingue in 1791 and culminated in the establishment of the first black republic in 1804,<sup>3</sup> has been called ‘unthinkable’ within Enlightenment thought by the Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot precisely because it ‘challenged the very framework in which proponents and opponents had examined race, colonialism and slavery in the Americas’ (Trouillot, 1995: 82–3). The engagement of enslaved and colonised people with the ideas of universal rights associated with the Enlightenment is not, as has often been implied, a process of serial claims to the extension of these rights, but rather a simultaneous and redefining engagement which was under way even as such ideas were being formulated. In the case of Haiti, it was an engagement which drew upon several distinct systems of thought and, most significantly, on the lived experience of slavery, to reconfigure the meanings of ‘freedom’, ‘property’ and ‘labour’ (James, 1938; Fick, 1990; Trouillot, 1995; Sheller, 2000; Bogue, 2004). As Trouillot argues, ‘the claims of the revolution were indeed too radical to be formulated in advance of its deeds. Victorious practice could assert them only after the fact’ (1995: 88). That mainstream accounts of this period in world history can still ignore the Haitian Revolution (Trouillot, 1995: 95–107; Shilliam, 2008) testifies to the tenacity of racialised exclusion and erasure.

At the same time, the concept of ‘race’ as a socially constructed, historically and spatially contingent and mutable system of categorisation has not remained static. This chapter seeks to highlight two aspects of this mutability in particular. First, changing dominant notions of ‘race’ were both shaped by, and in turn made possible, changing patterns of global capital accumulation during the course of the nineteenth century. Second, ideas about racial hierarchy were deployed in response to multiple forms of anti-colonial resistance, and were themselves altered and reconfigured by such resistance. Both of these processes of change, as this book argues, have continued to be important to an understanding of the continuing presence of ‘race’ in the period since 1945, when ‘development’ came to the fore as the pre-eminent framework through which relations between the global North and South are understood.

From this perspective, the chapter will examine the uprisings of 1857 in India (still more widely known in Britain as the ‘Indian Mutiny’) as one of a number of key moments in the social construction of ‘race’. This is not to suggest that other events in other places are not equally significant in this respect. On the contrary, the existence of many such formative moments is central to my argument here. For example, the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 and the responses to it can be analysed in similar ways (Gilroy, 1993: 11). Further, these events and the responses they generate are always partially shaped by earlier, and often less visible or smaller-scale, acts of resistance. In India, for example, there were at least seventy-seven separate officially recorded instances of peasant uprisings during British colonial rule, and this does not reflect the extent of more ‘day-to-day’ forms of resistance to colonial rule.

Undoubtedly, however, the unprecedented scale and social diversity of the 1857 uprisings triggered significant changes in colonial strategies. On the one hand, ideas of racial superiority and the importance of racial segregation, which had already taken hold, were consolidated and institutionalised. Colonial narratives of the ‘Mutiny’ and its suppression were instrumental in the development of notions of the ‘barbaric’ colonial subject who must be controlled by force, and in the fixing of the still-fluid category of ‘whiteness’ in the metropolis. On the other hand, and in direct response to the articulations of syncretic and pan-regional political projects within insurgent discourses, the aftermath of the uprisings saw a sustained attempt to ‘reinvent’ India as a society insuperably divided along religious, ethnic and caste lines, drawing upon specific and selective

interpretations of the region's history, cultures and social practices. The rise of Social Darwinism and the emergence of colonial anthropology as a discipline were to systematise the racialisation of difference through processes of enumeration, measurement and categorisation. Dominant classes and groups whose power had been consolidated by post-1857 policies also became invested in the notions of 'race', with important implications for post-independence politics. These approaches influenced colonial policies in Africa from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards, in particular the system of indirect rule and the incorporation and transformation of the institutions of chiefship in the name of protecting 'tradition' (Mamdani, 1996; Cooper and Stoler, 1997). However, it is difficult to grasp fully the implications of these processes without considering the changes in the structure of global capital in this period, which in India meant a shift from the extortion of the East India Company's eighteenth-century taxation and trade to nineteenth-century deindustrialisation and, increasingly, forced cultivation, in order to provide markets and raw materials for Britain's rapidly growing industries.

## Remembering 1857

In 1857 Baba Ram Charan Das (who was a Hindu) and Amir Ali (a Muslim), both leaders of the uprisings, were hanged from the same tree in Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh) by the British. In the years that followed, this tree became a shrine for both Muslims and Hindus to remember and celebrate their resistance. Fearful of this unity, the British administration had the tree cut down.

2007 marked the 150th anniversary of the sustained and widespread uprisings against British rule which spread across much of the northern half of what is now India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and lasted almost two years. At their centre was a massive mutiny by Indian soldiers (known as *sipahis* or *sepoys*) in the British East India Company's army: of 139,000 *sepoys* in the Bengal Army, all but 796 rebelled. But the uprisings were also marked by the breadth of popular participation, which 'simultaneously drew together and cut through multiple religious, caste, and regional identities' (Krishna, 2006). Their commemoration, both in South Asia and in Britain, reflected the multiplicity of readings of the events and the meanings attributed to them by different social forces and actors, and the contemporary reconfigurations of 'race' in the context of the current period of neoliberal imperialism.

For left-oriented organisations in South Asia and Britain which were engaged in ongoing movements against imperialism, war, racism and the religious right, the anniversary was an opportunity to highlight parallels between 1857 and the contemporary conjuncture, and to celebrate and reaffirm the anti-imperialist and supra-communal character of the uprisings. For example, in Britain, the 1857 Committee and South Asia Solidarity Group held a conference entitled '1857/2007: Imperialism, "Race", Resistance' in which the participants focused as much on the urgency of contemporary struggles as on those of 1857.

For the Indian state, however, the commemoration was notably muted: in contrast to the triumphalist rhetoric accompanying economic liberalisation which marked the first decade of the twenty-first century, the neoliberal state's approach to what official Indian historiography had come to term the 'First war of independence' was perhaps inevitably ambivalent rather than celebratory. This reflected the deep contradictions at the heart of India's model of economic growth, involving not only rapidly growing inequality and the marginalisation of significant sections of the population, but also untrammelled and destructive incursions by Indian and foreign-owned global corporations. Uncomfortably reminiscent of the actions of the East India Company, the 'world's first multinational corporation' (Robins, 2006), which represented British interests in 1857. 2007 itself witnessed

continuing struggles against the establishment of Special Economic Zones using the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894,<sup>4</sup> where state laws were suspended and corporations could appoint administrators. The months leading up to the anniversary in May 2007 year saw killings by police and paramilitaries of people resisting state-sponsored corporate acquisition of their land in Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal and Kalinganagar in Orissa, while similar movements against displacement and corporate takeover of land continued in many other parts of the country.

Meanwhile the Indian state was deeply implicated in contemporary imperialist projects as a key ally in the 'War on Terror', into which it had integrated its own long-running war on the people of Kashmir and its ongoing conflict with Pakistan, which further complicated its commemoration of the anti-imperialist resistance of 1857. In fact, only two years earlier Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had affirmed his contribution to the 'rehabilitation' of colonialism associated with the post-Cold War era with a speech at Oxford University in which he hailed the 'beneficial consequences' of British colonial rule, including 'Our notions of the rule of law, of a Constitutional government, of a free press, of a professional civil service, of modern universities and research laboratories. ... Our judiciary, our legal system, our bureaucracy and our police', echoing the sentiments of Gordon Brown (then chancellor in the British government), who had chosen a visit to Tanzania to wax eloquent in praise of British colonialism and its promotion of 'British values'. Further, the previous decade had seen the entrenchment within the institutions of the Indian state of Hindu supremacist notions of citizenship (notions which, as discussed in Chapter 10, are quite consistent with neoliberal imperialism) and the Hindu supremacist project of rewriting India's history as one determined by Hindu-Muslim conflict, a version which, as we will see, is decisively undermined by a focus on 1857.

British official references to the anniversary were also subdued and ambivalent, requiring as they did that events marked inescapably by insurgent and counter-insurgent violence should be described in the language in which the entire colonial encounter between Britain and India is now officially cast as part of a long-running and mutually beneficial 'close relationship'. The burst of popular historiography by British writers that the anniversary produced is perhaps more revealing. These included several reworkings of colonial historiography in which the beleaguered British were once again the heroic subjects (see, for example, [David, 2003](#); [Spilsbury, 2007](#); [Fremont-Barnes, 2007](#)). Arguably the book that had the greatest impact, however, was William Dalrymple's *The Last Mughal* (2006), which dealt with the siege of Delhi in 1857, and promises to present for the first time 'an Indian perspective' on the siege. In the next section, we consider the ongoing debates which surround the events described in the book and the key questions they raise relating to imperialism, resistance, religion and 'race', and ask why Dalrymple's version of 1857 proved so influential 150 years later.

### **The remaking of 1857 as a 'clash of rival fundamentalisms'**

*The Last Mughal* focuses exclusively on the experiences of Delhi, the seat of the Mughal dynasty which had ruled for 330 years. Beginning a few years before the uprising when the Mughal emperor had already been reduced to a puppet ruler by the East India Company officials, his writ extending only as far as the walls of the Red Fort (and 'even there it was circumscribed'), Dalrymple argues that this period nonetheless represented the coming to fruition of a syncretic, tolerant, highly literate culture, which the Mughal court had encouraged among its subjects, both Muslim and Hindu. He then traces the events which unfolded after the first major rebellion of sepoys took place in Meerut and the insurgent forces headed for Delhi to claim the Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar II, as their leader, narrating the flight of the British from the city, the siege of Delhi, and the wholesale massacre of



Delhi's citizens by the victorious British which followed.

In a departure from earlier historiography, Dalrymple portrays the uprisings as primarily a 'war of religion' between Islam and Christianity. While acknowledging that the 'great majority' of the sepoys were Hindus, he places unprecedented emphasis on the presence in Delhi of 'insurgents [who] described themselves as mujahedin, ghazis and jihadis' and who, towards the end of the siege, came to constitute 'about a quarter of the total fighting force' in the city (2006: 23).

Dalrymple claims to have uncovered Islamic 'jihad' in 1857, pointedly ignoring the work of many established Indian historians who have over the last thirty years documented the religious idiom through which resistance to imperialism was expressed among both Hindus and Muslims of various backgrounds during 1857 (see, for example, Mukherjee, 1984: 147–54; Roy, 1994: 51–3). More generally, the influential Subaltern Studies group has extensively critiqued the failure to engage with the varied forms and idioms of resistance which marks both colonial and nationalist Indian historiography. Elsewhere, an in-depth study by Rajat Kanta Ray (2003) describes how, in the case of 1857, people sharing a syncretic culture but identifying with distinct religions consciously united to fight the British colonizers:

it was, in their view, a struggle of the Hindus and Muslims against the Nazarenes – not so much because the latter were supposed to be determined to impose the false doctrine of the Trinity, but because the identity of 'the Hindus and Muslims of Hindustan' was being threatened by the moral and material aggrandizement of the arrogant imperial power. (Ray, 2003: 357).

In this case, then, resistance to imperial rule was waged in the name of a single nation, 'Hindustan' (India), and two religions: Islam and Hinduism. As Ray notes, rebel proclamations were issued addressed to 'the Hindus and Muslims of Hindustan',<sup>5</sup> and where the British had been defeated it was announced that 'the two religions govern'.

However, Dalrymple dismisses these more complex understandings of the collective anti-imperialist resistance that pre-dated the emergence of bourgeois nationalism in India in favour of the notion of a 'clash of rival fundamentalisms'. This is all the more striking because it contradicts considerable evidence of his own. For example, Dalrymple refers to the ambiguity and multiple meanings of the term 'jihad' itself, which is used, among others referred to in the book, by a Hindu rebel general to describe the uprising; later, he notes the concerted attempt by the British authorities to reconstruct the uprisings as an exclusively Muslim affair, which began even before they had been completely suppressed. He explains that

the emperor was put on trial and charged, quite inaccurately, with being behind a Muslim conspiracy to subvert the empire stretching from Mecca and Iran to Delhi's Red Fort. Contrary to evidence that the uprising broke out first among the overwhelmingly Hindu sepoys, the prosecutor argued that 'to Musalman intrigues and Mahommedan conspiracy we may mainly attribute the dreadful calamities of 1857'. (Dalrymple, 2007)

As historian Mubarak Ali explains, this theory was consolidated in the years that followed.

British historians ... Alfred Layall and William Muir argued that generally the people of India were satisfied by the British rule and those who created trouble against the government were the Muslim elite which had lost its privileges during the course of time ... This view was further strengthened by J.G Brown in his book *The Punjab and Delhi in 1857* (1861) He writes that: 'That the Mohammadan should conspire against the Christians is not to be wondered at-his creed teaches it; the Koran demands it of him...' (Ali, 2007a)<sup>6</sup>

Dalrymple once again prioritises the role of religion when analysing British actions both before and during the uprisings, which he attributes to the growing influence of evangelical Christianity. This allows him both to downplay other changes in the character of imperialism in this period and to romanticise an earlier era of British rule under the East India Company from the mid-eighteenth

century onwards.

Dalrymple contrasts his apocalyptic, proto-9/11 view of 1857 with a previous golden age when British officers of the East India Company adopted Indian dress and ‘cohabited’ with ‘Indian Bibis’. Oblivious to questions of race, gender and power, Dalrymple lovingly portrays these ‘white Moghuls’ with their ‘numerous’ wives as ‘splendidly multicultural’ and furthering an idyllic ‘fusion of civilisations’. In fact, the distinctions between the ‘orientalist’ ideas which circulated among the representatives of empire and emerging theories of racial hierarchy were far less rigid than writers like Dalrymple suggest (Kapila, 2007).

Equally significantly, Dalrymple ignores the fact that following the British defeat of Siraj-ud-Daulah in the Battle of Plassey<sup>7</sup> in 1757, the British presided over a century of intensive plunder and destruction of India’s economy, through the twin weapons of ruthless taxation and coerced trade. Thus, for example, Warren Hastings, one of the ‘orientalist’ British scholars whom Dalrymple refers to with admiration (and so clearly wishes to emulate), is better known for his achievement as Governor General of Bengal of presiding over an increase in the rate of taxes collected by the East India Company at the height of the 1769–73 famine brought on by the company’s policies in Eastern India. This famine killed an estimated 10 million people, one-third of the population of what was then known as Bengal.<sup>8</sup> But in February 1771, the Company’s officers in Calcutta could report back to the directors that, ‘notwithstanding the great severity of the late famine and the great reduction of people thereby, some increase has been made’ in revenue collection (Robins, 2006: 92).

The East India Company’s records themselves described the extent of the coercion and violence that continued to be involved in the extraction of revenue, as well as in the appropriation of resources and labour power by the Company in the decades that followed, leading Marx to comment in the context of the 1857 uprisings on ‘the universal existence of torture as a financial institution of British India’ (Karl Marx, *New York Daily Tribune*, 17 September 1857). The East India Company’s trade in Indian textiles, which were in huge demand in Europe, was also carried out through intense coercion: ‘From a situation of relative economic independence, Bengal’s weavers were forced into a position of near slavery, unable to sell to others and obliged to accept whatever the company’s agents (*gomastahs*) would offer for their cloth’ (Robins, 2006: 77).

The years leading up to 1857, however, saw major changes in the objectives, methods and dominant ideology of imperialism, of which the rise of evangelical Christianity emphasised by Dalrymple was only one element. India was now seen not solely as a source of enormous tax revenues and valuable consumer goods procured by force, but as a market for Britain’s own manufacturing industries and increasingly, a source of raw materials. To serve the needs of the powerful new ‘millocracy’, the British now set about systematically destroying India’s thriving and sophisticated textile industry by imposing high tariffs to prevent exports. This ensured that the British textile industry did not have to face free-market competition. The explanation of contemporary historian Horace Wilson is worth quoting in full:

It was stated in evidence (in 1813) that the cotton and silk goods of India, up to this period, could be sold for a profit in the British market at a price from 50 to 60 per cent. lower than those fabricated in England. It consequently became necessary to protect the latter by duties of 70 or 80 per cent. on their value, or by positive prohibition. Had this not been the case, had not such prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and of Manchester would have been stopped in their outset, and could hardly have been again set in motion, even by the powers of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of the Indian manufactures. Had India been independent, she would have retaliated; would have imposed preventive duties upon British goods, and would thus have preserved her own productive industry from annihilation. This act of self-defence was not permitted her; she was at the mercy of the stranger. British goods were forced upon her without paying any duty; and the foreign manufacturer employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor with whom he could not

By the 1830s, India's thriving textile industry had been all but destroyed, and by the middle of the century India was importing one-quarter of all British cotton textile exports (Palme Dutt, 1945: 119). Prosperous manufacturing towns like Dhaka (now the capital of Bangladesh), Murshidabad (now West Bengal in India) and Surat (now in Gujarat in India) were devastated as spinning and weaving ceased and people were forced to move out into the countryside for subsistence. Sir Charles Trevelyan told the parliamentary inquiry of 1840: 'The population of the town of Dacca [Dhaka] has fallen from 150,000 to 30,000 or 40,000 and the jungle and malaria are fast encroaching ... Dacca, which was the Manchester of India, has fallen off from a very flourishing town to a very poor and small one' (cited in Palme Dutt, 1945: 120).

This process of deindustrialisation had important implications for gender relations. As Nirman Banerjee has documented in the case of Bengal (Banerjee, 1989), it involved households in urban areas in which women had been engaged in occupations like weaving, which gave them relative greater autonomy within the household, losing their livelihoods and being forced to migrate to the countryside and turn to agriculture, within which women's role was seen as primarily reproductive. Such changes were reinforced in the later part of the nineteenth century by colonial interventions and a 'culture' that sought to consolidate gendered notions of femininity and respectability that were consistent with dominant patriarchal constructions in Victorian Britain.

The millions who lost their source of employment as a consequence of the destruction of India's manufacturing included not only spinners and weavers but potters, smelters and smiths, along with many other artisans and crafts workers. This group formed an important section among those who joined the rebels in 1857 (Habib, 2007). In the decades that followed, Indian cultivators would be forced to grow indigo, cotton and wheat for export to Britain. Such policies required the expansion of areas of direct British rule through the annexation of the territories of their erstwhile Indian allies, and an enhanced colonial state apparatus with much larger numbers of British officials. This 'age of empire' saw the consolidation of the ideology of white superiority, racial segregation and the 'civilising mission'. Further, as Rudrangshu Mukherjee writes, describing the quotidian violence of the pre-1857 period, 'British rule ... visibly manifested itself by marking the body of the Indian. ... Imperial rule in India could only perpetuate itself by a deployment of terror, a terror that would strike awe in the minds of the ruled' (Mukherjee, 1990: 94).

While Dalrymple notes that by 1850 British army officers had 'become increasingly distant, rude and dismissive' to the men under their command (2006: 136), he ignores the ideology of racial supremacy which underpinned the daily racist abuse and violence faced by the sepoys as well as civilians, identified as a central cause of the uprisings within insurgent discourses. Ray cites an English reconstruction of a speech attributed to Maulvi Sarfraz Ali of Shahjahanpur:

But you will ask perhaps what have they done to deserve this? I answer: If *suar gadha* ['swine, pig or hog, ass or donkey: very common epithets applied by the Europeans to the natives of India': *footnote in the original*] in the public streets and 'damn your eyes' in the public courts is a form of compliment acceptable to you, they then have deserved well at your hands. Have you never seen a fellow-countryman of yours kicked by the whites, and sometimes the cane laid across his back? Have you ever known them to be addressed other than 'nigger' or '*kala suar*'? These are everyday occurrences. (cited in Ray, 2003: 361)

A contemporary British observer noted that

the sepoy is [regarded as] an inferior creature. He is sworn at. He is treated roughly. He is spoken of as a 'nigger'. He is addressed as 'suar' or pig. ... [the younger British officers] seem to regard it as an excellent joke, as an evidence of spirit and a praiseworthy sense of superiority over the sepoy to treat him as an inferior animal. (cited in Hibbert, 1978: 56)

These accounts of day-to-day racism in this period in India, and in particular the prevalence of the word ‘nigger’ in racist abuse, strikingly highlight the determining category within which all those who were enslaved and colonised were defined within popular racist discourse, even as ever more complex taxonomies and hierarchies of ‘race’ were being theorised by European scholars. Both of these understandings, however, were underpinned by the same binary opposition in which all those who were excluded from whiteness were constructed as less than fully human, as the constant references to animals underline.

Unlike most British accounts to date, Dalrymple describes in detail the ‘full scale of the viciousness and brutality’ of the colonial response to the uprisings, which ‘in many cases would today be classified as grisly war crimes’ (2006: 14–15). In this he departs from the pattern identified in the British press coverage of the time by Karl Marx (who was a contemporary commentator) and still present in recent historiography, where ‘while the cruelties of the English are related as acts of martial vigour, told simply, rapidly, without dwelling in disgusting details, the outrages of the native, shocking as they are, are still deliberately exaggerated’ (Marx, 1959: 74–5, cited in Newsinger, 2000: 74; for a recent example of this genre, see David, 2003).

Yet, despite this, Dalrymple seems unable to comprehend fully the nature of colonial violence or its ubiquity. Thus, referring to the mass rape of Indian women following the fall of Delhi, he comments that, ‘believing that the British women in Delhi had been sexually assaulted at the outbreak – a rumour that subsequently proved quite false. ... British officers did little to stop their men from raping the women of Delhi’ (2006: 462–3). In the absence of an analysis of racism he cannot understand why the ‘quite false’ allegations of rape of British women by Indian men were so effective and so widespread at the time, and how such allegations have been a central instrument in the operation of colonial and racialised power, regulation and violence in many different contexts. Nor can he acknowledge that, with or without such allegations, the rape of colonised women by coloniser men has been a central aspect of colonial violence. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Dalrymple ultimately conforms to the dominant version of events: that British atrocities were carried out specifically as ‘retribution’ for the massacre of British women and children at Kanpur. In reality, the terror had already been unleashed in the countryside by Colonel James Neill, whose troops – burning villages, hanging and shooting men and young boys, and raping women – massacred thousands of men, women and children well before the Kanpur killings.

While Dalrymple enthuses about the ‘street-level nature’ of the documentation he has unearthed relating to ‘ordinary citizens of Delhi’, in fact the overwhelming majority of his book, where it is not revisiting the oft-cited accounts of various British officers and civilians in Delhi, presents the perspective of the Mughal elite of the city. Dalrymple makes no attempt to portray the sepoys, who formed the core of the uprisings, in anything but the terms in which they were viewed by the Mughal elite: as ‘boorish and violent peasants from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh’ (2006: 17). He ignores some of the most significant processes that took place during the uprisings, such as the formation of the semi-republican Sepoy Councils by the rebels, which in practice made the decisions about how and by whom the areas captured from the British would be governed.<sup>9</sup>

Mubarak Ali describes the situation in Delhi after the arrival of the rebel forces:

The rebels used the king for their interest and issued orders with his seal and signature for the maintenance of peace and order in the city. ... real authority was vested into different councils whose task was to keep law and order, collect revenue, get loans from the moneylenders, and organize the army for war. (Ali, 2007b)

By ignoring these aspects of 1857, Dalrymple is able to sidestep the key question of whether the



- [\*The Origins of Olympus \(Pegasus, Book 4\) book\*](#)
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