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THE UNITED STATES' 'EMPIRE STATE OF MIND:' IDENTITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM IN A POST-9/11 WORLD

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THE UNITED STATES' "EMPIRE STATE OF MIND:"
IDENTITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM IN A POST-9/11 WORLD

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Margaret Ann McGill
May 2010

Accepted by:
Dr. Cameron Bushnell, Committee Chair
Dr. Angela Naimou
Dr. Susan Hilligoss

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relevance of postcolonialism in a world changed by the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks, which resulted in the openly aggressive and expansive nature of the United States in the years following, seeming reminiscent of European colonialism and soundly establishing a perception of the U.S. as an empire. Comparing Junot Díaz's pre-9/11 *Drown* with his post-9/11 *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Andrea Levy's pre-9/11 *Small Island* with Joseph O'Neill's post-9/11 *Netherland*, I explore the effects and influences of the United States imperial reach that surface in post-9/11 literature to contend its overwhelming presence has marked a turning point in postcolonial discussions; its emergence as the world's most powerful empire poses concerns in today's world, which thus demands a reenergizing of the postcolonialism through revision of its terms, particularly James Clifford's definition of diaspora and its effects on both constructions of male identity and constructions of national identity. It is the aim of this work to contend that by revising key discursive terms in the field, scholars must address the concept of post-9/11 U.S. imperialism to keep postcolonialism relevant in a Post-9/11 world.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my family and my David, all of who have supported me throughout it all. I love you dearly, and thank you deeply.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude to the chair of my committee, Dr. Cameron Bushnell, who helped make sense of the oftentimes chaotic mess that were my thoughts and ideas (which, of course, became the bulk of this work), who encouraged me when I felt frantic, and who patiently granted extension after extension after extension. You made this daunting process seem perfectly “doable” – even enjoyable! – and for that, I can never ever thank you enough.

Also, a big thank you to Keith Morris who introduced me to *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, even though you dislike it. My resistance to your resistance to Junot Diaz’s resistance to novel conventions sparked this thesis topic, which makes you complicit in further conversations of Diaz’s writings. Thanks!

Thank you to the Clemson University Cooper Library staff, which has allowed me to keep renewing the books I’ve checked out months ago for research.

Thank you, finally, to Spring, which soon will bring a nice, long month (at least!) of rest.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
 CHAPTER	
I. “ <i>FUKÚ AMERICANUS</i> :” THE DIASPORIC MALE	
IN JUNOT DÍAZ’S WORKS BEFORE AND AFTER 9/11	10
U.S. Intrusions and Díaz’s Magical Realist Response	
Before and After 9/11	12
Constructions of Masculinity in Pre-9/11 <i>Drown</i>	19
Constructions of Masculinity in Post-9/11 <i>Oscar Wao</i>	23
 II. POSTCOLONIAL INDIGNATION:	
DIASPORIC ENGLAND IN A POST-9/11 WORLD	30
<i>Postcolonial Melancholia</i> : A Pre-9/11 English Identity Crisis	32
Levy’s pre-9/11 <i>Small Island</i> : The Beginnings of English Diaspora	46
O’Neill’s post-9/11 <i>Netherland</i> :	
Postcolonial Indignation and English Psychological Diaspora	44
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 51

POSTCOLONIALISM IN A POST-9/11 WORLD, AN INTRODUCTION

What is the status of postcolonial theory today? If a sense of exhaustion exists in the field, does it presage postcolonialism's eventual demise? And if postcolonialism does indeed meet its end, what exactly was postcolonialism – its purpose and mission? Questions like these have persisted since at least 2005, when Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge in their article “What Was Postcolonialism?” confront the notion of the “end” of postcolonialism, arguing not that postcolonialism is officially dead, but that a recognition of the pastness of postcolonialism would reenergize the field of study. This retrospective includes reframing postcolonialism as the unfinished project of modernization through its cultural constructs.

Today, post-9/11 postcolonialism remains a location of concern for postcolonial scholars, many of whom continue to question whether or not the field of study has finally met its end now that there exists in the post-9/11 United States a return to openly aggressive, expansionist foreign policy. Indeed, all contributing authors to the roundtable discussion in “The End of Postcolonial Theory?” (2007 editor's column published by the MLA) invite a reenergized postcolonialism that expands beyond its current self-imposed temporal and spatial limitations, thereby entailing a transformation of its conceptual categories as well. An important category that needs to be recognized, the authors of this special article stress to their readers, is the concept of post-9/11 U.S. imperialism, which has so far been inadequately addressed. The panel suggests an existing urgency for postcolonial scholars' advocating for postcolonialism to address the U.S. imperialism and any affected countries, including Latin America and England.

Tendencies toward U.S. imperialism have long been recognized since the nineteenth century, when after successfully ousting Spain from Cuba and the Pacific, the McKinley administration decided to annex the Philippines in 1898 (Judis 12). Over a decade later, Woodrow Wilson realized the drawbacks of imperialism from the six-year war with Filipino rebels, the 1914 failure of U.S. intervention in Mexico, and the outbreak of the First World War, which Wilson blamed on imperial rivalry, and he began developing new international arrangements to phase out imperialism (Judis 13). Wilson failed to gain support both at home and abroad for his liberal internationalism, but Franklin D. Roosevelt endeavored to put into practice Wilson's ideas: "During the Second World War, Franklin D. Roosevelt viewed the continued existence of colonial empires as a possible cause for future wars," and so he lobbied for the eventual independence of colonies (Louis 3). While British and Commonwealth statesmen grasped right away "the irony of the American anti-colonial stance and simultaneous emergence of the United States as a global or quasi-imperial power" (Louis 565), Americans' staunch "anti-colonial sentiment (in combination with a new and overwhelming British sense of dependence on the United States) powerfully affected the state of British morale and also changed the judgments of colonial nationalists about the balance of power in the colonies" (Louis 568), providing the needed impetus toward decolonization of the European empires. With the U.S. 1989 invasion of Panama seeming to be the last imperial foray, the 1990s became "a high water mark of liberal internationalism" under both the George H. W. Bush and the Bill Clinton administrations, which strongly opposed imperial agendas (with George H. W. Bush opposing Iraqi presence in Kuwait)

and developing international arrangements (Judis 14). Predictions of the end of American hegemony date back as early as the mid-1990s, most likely because of these efforts made by American Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to distance the U.S. from at least the outward appearance of being imperial.

Things abruptly changed, however, when George W. Bush took office in 2001; he departed from the administrations before him by withdrawing the U.S. from the international arrangements and treaties, and his foreign policy echoed that of America's foreign policy in the years before the 1898 expansionist leap into annexing the Philippines (Judis 14). The abrupt change in approach certainly proved startling for leaders at home and abroad alike, but nothing prepared the world for how the U.S. now led by the Bush administration would respond to the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil on September 11th 2001. In developing a response to the September 11th terrorist attacks, Bush fell under the influence of neo-conservatives who believed that

[T]he U.S. should use its superior military power to intimidate and overthrow the regimes of 'rogue states' like Iraq that challenged American hegemony. (One typical slogan was 'rogue state rollback.')

The neo-cons didn't favor colonialism, but believed that by exerting its power the United States could produce regimes that did its bidding. After September 11, they spoke of openly of creating a new American empire. (Judis 14-15)

The aggressive and expansive nature of the Bush administration's resolve to bring democracy and freedom to Afghanistan and Iraq in the years following 9/11 seemed reminiscent of earlier European colonialism and has soundly established a perception of

the U.S. as an empire (Judis). However, the U.S. Empire differs from the European empires of the 19th and 20th centuries in its unipolarity on top. According to Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, the nature of U.S. imperialism must be understood as two-tiered system, which underscores its profoundly powerful position in the world as an empire: “the domination of imperialist countries on other countries, and the domination of the leader of the group [of imperialist countries] on its other members” (661). The powerful nature of the U.S. Empire is further highlighted when one considers the unprecedented gap between the U.S. and her contenders. The U.S. being “less compelled than earlier hegemony to share or delegate hegemony” indeed soundly demonstrates the depth of its perceived and possible power (Steinmetz 362). The openly aggressive stance the Bush administration employed in post-9/11 years, however, was just the tip of the iceberg, leaving unexposed the existence of a veiled, far more formidable tool maintaining the U.S. Empire, its long-standing, growing cultural imperialism.

While the U.S. certainly has engaged imperial strategies through use of its military force, the imperial nature of its culture necessitates a closer examination. I’ll pause here to offer a distinction between colonialism and imperialism via Edward Said: “‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism,’ which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (qtd. in Ashcroft 40). Cultural imperialism has become more pervasive and rigid, according to James Petras in his article, “Cultural Imperialism in the Late 20th Century.” It differs from imperialism in that it is “the systematic penetration and domination of cultural life

of the popular classes by the ruling class of the West in order to reorder the values, behavior, institutions and identity of the oppressed peoples to conform with the interests of the imperial classes” (140). U.S. cultural imperialism exists and dominates through its overwhelming and highly successful exportation of audiovisual material, which provides an unprecedented level of accessibility to American culture, fashion, and food, which has been criticized as subtly phasing out other cultures (Hutchison). Until recently, the ambiguous nature of U.S. Empire has complicated contemporary definitions of just what is an empire, largely because for decades it posed as anti-imperial in its ambition to spread liberation to the world. As a result of the openly imperial nature of U.S. moves in the years after 9/11, the reach of U.S. imperialist penetration via its culture, geopolitical influence, and its military strength finds a curious reaction in current literature that encourages a newer understanding of the postcolonialism, including importantly a concept of diaspora.

William Safran defines diaspora in essentially a “strict” list of six characteristics: 1) forced dispersion from an original center to at least two peripheral places for political, economic, and various reasons occurs; 2) the diasporic person always has a longing to return; 3) there exists the maintenance of the memory, vision or myth for the homeland; 4) diasporic people doubt acceptance, believing they can never assimilate fully; 5) they are committed to the preservation and restoration of their homeland; and 6) the diasporic person is defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland (qtd. in Clifford 304-05). In his article “Diasporas,” Clifford undermines and undoes this ideal definition of the concept in order to resist Safran’s creation of an all-inclusive, universalized typology of

diaspora. Instead, Clifford proposes a more polythetic definition that might retain Safran's features, but allows other considerations. One such consideration is that the Diasporic experience is always different for both genders: while Diaspora women may find their new predicaments "conducive to a positive renegotiation of gender relations," Diaspora men often find themselves subject to psychological subjugation (imposed on women and other powerless figures in their homeland) in a foreign country (314). This is often the case, because the Diaspora male no longer resides at the top of a national hierarchy, and because he is subjected to expectations of assimilation while in exile in order to survive, compelling him to submit to another cultural way of life.

Certainly, Clifford's revision of Safran's definition sufficiently addresses diasporic experiences in literature before the September 11th terrorist attacks. However, in texts written after 9/11 there exists a curious manifestation of the phenomenon that Clifford's definition fails to adequately address: simultaneous feelings of longing for and estrangement from one's homeland while continuing to live in the homeland, which leads to not only revised constructions of masculine identity, but also revised constructions of national identity. This thesis explores the effects and influences of the United States imperial reach that surface in post-9/11 literature to contend its overwhelming presence demands a reevaluation and revision of the notion of diaspora as explored in Clifford's revision of Safran's definition. I argue for redefinitions of Clifford's model that find inspiration from post-9/11 texts' depiction of the altered diasporic experiences, which evolved in response to U.S. imperialism in the years after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. The importance of these redefinitions lies in its significance to the

postcolonial field: by noting alterations to key concepts in postcolonial theory that come as a response to post-9/11 U.S. imperial aggression, the discipline finds a necessary reenergizing to its relevance in a post-9/11 world.

Overview of Chapters:

The first chapter, “‘*Fukú Americanus*:’ The Diasporic Male in Junot Díaz’s Works Before and After 9/11,” examines Junot Díaz’s pre-9/11 short story collection, *Drown*, and post-9/11 novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. In both works, there exists the blurring of boundaries between reality and the representation of reality, which parallels the blurring of cultural boundaries between the homeland – the Dominican Republic in both texts – and the subtly invasive nature of U.S. culture. Indeed, the indistinct nature of these borders ultimately fuels a Diasporic experience for the Dominican male protagonists, which serves as primary focus for this chapter. However, Díaz’s protagonists differ in their unique response to the constraints placed upon them as a result of their Diasporic experience: while oversexed Yunior (the protagonist of pre-9/11 *Drown*) ultimately submits to the overwhelmingly subtle American hegemony and accepts his bleak homelessness (and, thus, powerlessness), the post-9/11 *Oscar Wao* presents a protagonist (Oscar) who successfully navigates from powerlessness to empowerment, an inconceivable triumph achieved only temporarily after Oscar’s insistence upon distinguishing the blurred cultural boundaries between the two warring cultures, and then to juxtapose them as equal influences in lived existence. I will argue that the transition from the bleak despair of immigrants in pre-9/11 *Drown* to the hopeful

potential for immigrant empowerment in post-9/11 *Oscar Wao* identifies a turning point at 9/11, which thus calls for a revision of Clifford's assessment of the male diasporic experience.

The second and final chapter, "Postcolonial Indignation: Diasporic England in a Post-9/11 World," continues the discussion of how the presence of U.S. Empire in literature calls for further revision of Clifford's definition of diaspora. I examine Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* to consider the possibility of English psychological diaspora, which comes as a reaction to the U.S. usurping Britain's position as the world's dominant empire and superpower. The English psychological estrangement and simultaneous longing for their former empire fuels their postcolonial indignation, a revision of Paul Gilroy's notion of *postcolonial melancholia*. The tensions between the English and their immigrating colonists in Andrea Levy's pre-9/11 *Small Island* in many ways reflects Paul Gilroy's notion of postcolonial melancholia; however, the post-9/11 U.S. imperial moves as depicted in *Netherland* serve as a distraction to the English postcolonial melancholia, altering the terms of their Diasporic experience and, thus, significantly altering the terms of Gilroy's concept. Indeed, the U.S. acquisition of the very imperial prestige that the English cannot properly mourn so significantly influences the latter's postcolonial melancholic condition that English resentment is displaced from the "invading" colonial immigrants to the imperial power that absorbed them. Before the English people can even begin to confront their postcolonial melancholia in order to heal as a nation, they must first confront their *postcolonial indignation*, which is an underlying, collective resentment felt towards the United States

and other former colonies for the absorption of former British colonists and, thus, stripped imperial strength. Having done so, the English can finally construct a new national identity Gilroy calls for.

CHAPTER ONE

“*FUKÚ AMERICANUS:*”

BLURRED BOUNDARIES BEFORE AND AFTER 9/11

*The fact that I
am writing to you
in English
already falsifies what I
wanted to tell you.
My subject:
how to explain to you that I
don't belong to English
though I belong nowhere else.*

Gustavo Pérez Firmat

Díaz's selection of the above Gustavo Pérez Firmat poem (originally from Firmat's collection of poetry, *Bilingual Blues*) reflects themes central to not only his pre-9/11 short story collection *Drown*, but also his post-9/11 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. These themes include the Diasporic homelessness and, thus, powerlessness that follows immigration (“how to explain to you that I / don't belong to English / though I belong nowhere else”) and the blurring of boundaries between the representation of reality and reality itself in the immigrant experience – or as we find in these novels the indeterminacy of hybrid, competing cultural representations and lived experiences of the protagonists ([t]he fact that I / am writing to you / in English / already falsifies what I / wanted to tell you”). While *Drown* follows the oftentimes hopelessly depressed narrative of oversexed, first generation immigrant Yunior who ultimately accepts his homelessness (and, thus, his powerlessness), the post-9/11 *Oscar Wao*

presents an American of second-generation Dominican heritage protagonist Oscar de León who successfully navigates from powerlessness to empowerment once he rejects the assimilationist pressures of diasporic experience imposed upon him.

The two works find further connections in the numerous blurred boundaries, which illuminate and define the male diasporic experience. Blurring thematic and structural boundaries as utilized by Junot Díaz in *Drown* and *Oscar Wao* parallels the blurred cultural boundaries between the homeland (the Dominican Republic) and the ominous, ever-intruding imperial presence of the United States. The indistinct nature of the cultural borders between the U.S. and the D.R. as portrayed in Díaz's works finds significance in that it directly marks the constraint on each of Díaz's Dominican male immigrant characters: each masculine identity becomes of figure of ambiguity, shackled in the dominant cultural demands of diasporic experience. Although both works share an underlying condemnation of and thus resistance against the blurring of these cultural boundaries, the works depart in how the protagonists react to the economic, social, and cultural restrictions of low-wage job, ghetto living, and ethnic rivalries comprising the diasporic experience for D.R. immigrants to the U.S. The inability of Dominican immigrants to forestall the subsumption of their culture by dominant culture, both in the U.S. and in the DR itself calls for a reformulation of James Clifford's well-known definition of diaspora. which is important in that it provides an element to James Clifford's definition of diaspora that calls for a redefinition. The transition from diasporic hopelessness in pre-9/11 *Drown* to the hopeful potential for immigrant empowerment in post-9/11 *Oscar Wao* suggests a turning point in Díaz's treatment of his male immigrant

characters, which suggests ways to reenvision of Clifford's definition of diaspora to include an acknowledgement of diaspora's effects on the constructions of masculinity for male immigrants.

U.S. Intrusions and Díaz's Magical Realist Response Before and After 9/11

Latin American writers often write in the magical realist style, a genre characterized by the sudden invasion of fantastical elements in a highly realistic setting. In her 1998 article "Translating Exile: The Metamorphosis of the Ordinary in Dominican Short Fiction," however, Carrie Tirado Bramen argues that Latin American fictional protagonists can no longer "magically transcend their oppressive communities, but must grapple with their status as outcasts and try to negotiate a relatively safe refuge within" (75). Bramen ultimately contends that the Latin American region that experienced the emergence of and employed the use of magical realism "is now singing its swan song" in that the contemporary Latin American literature has shifted away from this movement (76). Indeed, Bramen's argument applies to *Drown*, where Yunior and his community find no liberation nor empowerment through magical means, but rather finds relief through more realistic means of stealing that compensates in some small measure for the deprivations within their oppressive community. Yunior's resignation to selling narcotics and stealing in order to create -- as Bramen put it -- "a relatively safe refuge" within in the dismal environment of his childhood neighborhood, as opposed to actively pursuing any prospective route that would lead him to liberation outside the bleak atmosphere in which he drowns, suggests an agency available only through illegality or resignation to

disempowered despair as the only real options for the Latin American individual experiencing the effects of diaspora, including the absence of male role models and poverty. In the pre-9/11 *Drown*, a short story collection that narrates the hopeless life of Dominican immigrant Yunior in the U.S., it seems that there exists no viable escape from the constraints placed upon the diasporic male, just a somewhat secure shelter within the desolate environment of the immigrant community in a foreign country.

Díaz reverts to employing magical realist elements in *Oscar Wao*, which blur the lines between the representation of reality in the novel and fantasy, noticeable throughout the story. In *Oscar Wao*, the nerdy title character lives a highly realistic, unhappy life in the U.S. because he identifies neither with his Dominican heritage (because he behaves too much like an American) nor with his American heritage (because of his tight familial ties to the D.R.). Magical elements penetrate this realistic narrative whenever Oscar travels to his true homeland, the D.R., where he finally finds happiness. These elements include Trujillo's alleged supernatural powers, La Inca's prayer that is so powerful that "the Devil himself had to avoid the Sur for months afterward" (*Oscar Wao* 145), the Aslan-esque (but more powerful) Mongoose who saves Beli, and the faceless man – a figure also present in *Drown*, but far less magical than in *Oscar Wao*. In Díaz's short story collection, two stories concern this faceless figure, which in this pre-9/11 text is a marginalized boy who is frequently subjected to painful taunts and abuse from other children. The faceless boy, named Ysrael, has a definitive existence in the collection, possessing a family and a terrifying history everyone knew: "Even on this side of Ocoa people had heard of him, how when he was a baby a pig had eaten his face off, skinned it

like an orange. He was something to talk about, a name that set the kids to screaming, worse than el Cuco or la Vieja Calusa” (*Drown* 7). Interestingly, the only story in the collection to have an ambiguous nature regarding the existence of magical elements is Ysrael’s second story, “No Face.” In this story, the faceless figure seems to have super strength, super speed, and the power to become invisible; however, the possibility of Ysrael possessing superpowers is diminished in the face of the bleak realism surrounding his daily “fighting evil” (*Drown* 160), suggesting that the only thing magical about Ysrael is his powerful sense of imagination in his powerless state of existence. Significantly, the no faced man reemerges in the post-9/11 *Oscar Wao* as a terrifying, supernatural figure in an otherwise realistic setting, a clear utilization of magical realist element. Why would Díaz relapse to employing an outdated genre, as previously argued by Bramen?

Perhaps the reason for Díaz’s reversion back to magical realism lies in the openly imperial nature of the United States in the period after the 9/11 attacks. Certainly the novel’s most prevalent magical element is the “*fukú americanus*” (no doubt a play on words to reflect a deeper meaning of defiance toward America), which is the “curse and the doom of the New World” (*Oscar Wao* 1). Its foreign origins (from Africa, “carried in the screams of the enslaved”) are unsettling and ominous, but relevant to this discussion, because it is “the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola [that] unleashed the *fukú* on the world, and we’ve all been in the shit ever since” (1). While the *fukú* has existed since enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean, its imposition on Oscar’s family significantly begins with U.S.-backed Trujillo: “No one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse’s servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an

understanding, that them two was *tight*" (2-3). With the U.S. meddling in Dominican affairs by supporting Trujillo's dictatorship—one among many U.S.-backed Caribbean dictatorships, as Yunior is quick to remind his readers—the U.S. becomes associated with the fuku. That is, the U.S., by investing in a dictator tainted by the fuku curse of enslaved Africans, becomes identified with the oppression that began in slavery, extended through the cruelty of the Trujillo regime and continued through the U.S. military and political interventions, eventually marring even the more banal U.S. cultural presence. It is especially the U.S. intrusion into Dominican affairs is what ultimately brings about the hardships and diasporic condition with which this family struggles. Because Díaz uses magical realist elements in *Oscar Wao* to specifically reveal underlying resentment toward and resistance against the U.S. Empire, the blurring of generic boundaries in both works points to a much larger concern: the blurring of cultural boundaries between the Dominican Republic and the intruding United States.

Because of its physical and cultural intrusions, the U.S. has unofficially (because by cultural means) absorbed vulnerable D.R., thus resulting in an ambiguously defined cultural borders between the two countries. One intrusion by the U.S. in particular, its support of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina (henceforth called Trujillo), set in motion a monstrous thirty-year dictatorship in the D.R. In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior offers the D.R.'s version of history in his very first footnote a stylistic choice that will be discussed further below) of the novel: "Trujillo came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social, and economic life through a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror; treated the country like it was a

plantation and he was the master” (*Oscar Wao* 2). Yunior explains that Trujillo’s exceptional accomplishments (other than sexually conquering every “hot girl in sight, even the wives of his subordinates, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of women”) include:

[T]he 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community; one of the longest, most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it’s tolerating U.S.-backed dictators, so you know this was a hard-earned victory, the chilenos and the argentinos are still appealing); [. . .] and, last but not least, the forging of the Dominican peoples into a modern state (did what his Marine trainers, during the Occupation, were unable to do).
(2-3)

Interestingly, Yunior’s history of Trujillo’s reign in the D.R. subtly compares it to the U.S., noting similar aggressive, self-serving agendas at the expense of the Dominican people; such a comparison certainly reveals Yunior’s bitter hatred toward Trujillo, which matches his resentment to the U.S. for putting him in power. By meddling in Dominican political affairs, and invading physically in 1965 and then culturally by means of establishing U.S. businesses, media, and culture in the D.R. over the years following 1965, the U.S. has in many ways “Americanized” the D.R., or as Yunior bitterly says, brought it into a “modern” state. This ambiguity caused by cultural invasion not only throws the Dominican immigrant characters further into diaspora, but also fuels their interesting resistance against the blurred boundaries.

While Díaz's novel specifically points out the United States' physical occupations of the Dominican Republic and its meddling in the country's affairs, the real threat posed to the Dominican homeland is instead the U.S. aggressive cultural intrusion, which is certainly a deep concern in *Oscar Wao*. Indeed, the entire novel is overwhelmed by constant references to predominantly American comic books, movies, science fiction and fantasy literature, and television shows, including but of course not limited to the following: *Star Trek* dolls, *Planet of the Apes* lunchbox (the American movie and most likely not the book inspired this piece of merchandise), *Herculoids*, *Space Ghost*, *Land of the Lost*, *Scooby-Doo*, *The Simpsons*, and *The Matrix*, not to mention the numerous references to *The Lord of the Rings* series (quite possibly the only non-American allusion), *Superman*, and *Watchmen*. The first encounter the reader experiences with this type of imperialism is found with the novel's very first epigraph: "Of what import are brief, nameless lives . . . to Galactus??", a reference to the American comic book, *Fantastic Four*. The tireless onslaught of American pop cultural references scattered throughout the narrative in many ways introduces the reader the Americanization that Oscar and his homeland experience.

Indistinct boundaries between cultures are noticeable in both works, but especially so in *Oscar Wao* during Oscar's final visits to the Dominican Republic. Having been freed from Trujillo's dictatorship for several decades, but having also experienced a U.S. intervention and occupation in the interim period between the Trujillo regime's end and present-day, the D.R. has now come under considerable influence of U.S. culture. From Oscar's observations of his homeland (Oscar notices American fast-

food restaurants everywhere, including “asshole tourists hogging up all the beaches” while the rest of the Dominican population seems to endure “mind-boggling poverty”), the D.R. is presented as having been transformed as a result of U.S.-backed Trujillo’s murder by U.S.-backed assassins and the subsequent years of Dominican immigration to the States. Such a departure exposes immigrants to the ever-influencing U.S. culture, which no doubt is then carried back home to family and communities in the Dominican Republic when its sons and daughters return home for annual summer visits. Indeed, Oscar comments upon this “whole new country” that seemed to be “materializing atop the ruins of the old one: there were now better roads and nicer vehicles and brand-new luxury air-conditioned buses plying the longer routes to the Cibao and beyond and U.S. fast-food restaurants” (273). Returning to the homeland that has come to resemble more of an imitation of the U.S. rather than its original self, Oscar experiences a sense of homelessness experienced by those in diaspora.

Latin diaspora males who immigrate to the imperial U.S. to find work (and, thus, money to survive), and especially their sons who are consequently left without a father figure, respond to this imposed submission from the aggressive U.S. Empire in telling ways. One such response is best explored in John Riofrio’s article, “Situating Latin American Masculinity: Immigration, Empathy and Emasculation in Junot Díaz’s *Drown*.” Riofrio examines potentially damaging effects immigration has on the Latin American male identity, paying close attention to the notion of machismo and how this excess of masculinity informs Díaz’s collection of short stories. Masculinity, Riofrio argues, is merely a set of definitions of what it means to be a “real man” imposed externally. The

consequences of this ideology, according to Riofrio, are that men are not simply born but made, often through sexual action, an observation that is noticeably true in Latin American literary discussions of masculinity. The absence of the father figure and the feeling of abandonment which accompanies this absence also factor into construction of masculinity, both of which oblige these “fatherless boys” to construct their own vision of masculinity. The result is that peers rather than fathers shoulder responsibility for teaching each other how to be men – a “hyper-masculinity hopelessly disconnected to reality and selfish in the way that only adolescent machismo allows” (27). As a result of the U.S. Empire’s seduction of Dominican fathers with the promise of a better life, which leaves their sons not only fatherless but also powerless, the Dominican male children in *Drown* respond to the absence of father figures first define masculinity with aggressive behavior, significant because their behavior mirrors the forceful, penetrating nature of U.S. cultural imperial moves. This aggression tends to assert itself in one of two ways: violent behavior toward others who potentially threaten one’s masculinity, and highly sexualized, conquering advances when interacting with women.

Constructions of Masculinity in Pre-9/11 *Drown*

In these novels, even more disturbing and prominent than the violent assertion of masculinity is the sexually aggressive and conquering nature of the male’s interaction and feelings toward women, significant in that it contributes to the construction of diasporic male identity that appropriates political violence for use in domestic spaces. In *Drown*, for example, Yunior’s sexual escapades are well documented throughout,

especially in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” in which Yunior methodically explains how a male can effectively persuade a girl of any race to “give it up” and engage in sexual intercourse (*Drown* 147). After getting rid of the family for the day, one significant step is to eliminate any evidence such as family photos and government cheese that would suggest dependency in any way, which of course suggests weakness. Indeed, avoiding any appearance of weakness dwells at the very core of Yunior’s sexual conquest method, especially his rule to ignore Howie, a huge Puerto Rican nemesis who could physically dismantle Yunior, if he should encounter Howie while still on a date. Knowing Howie’s strength, Yunior chooses to disregard Howie for one important reason: “[n]ever lose a fight on the first date or that will be the end of it” (146). The narrator’s genuinely authoritative voice, which articulates the thoroughly detailed step-by-step presentation of the his advice, suggests an inconceivable number of opportunities in which the narrator has employed this approach on a large number of girls of each race mentioned in the story’s title, thereby suggesting his ultimate goal lies in the conquest and thus validating his hyper-sexualized masculine identity. In another short story, “Boyfriend,” the narrator overhears his neighbor fight with her boyfriend, who expresses a desire to end their relationship. The narrator, presumably Yunior who has narrated most of the stories in the collection, claims he knows “boyfriend’s” type and explains that “boyfriend” frequented bars, bringing home girls for the night while his girlfriend was away: “He was one of those dark-skinned smooth-faced brothers that women kill for, and I knew for a fact, having seen his ass in action at the local spots, that he liked to get over on the white girls” (114). The boyfriend’s systematic handling of the

situation, and apparent carelessness regarding his girlfriend in the matter, further suggests the use of sexual conquering to validate masculinity that is present throughout *Drown*.

Related to sexual conquering, diasporic males use violence to validate their masculinity. In *Drown's* opening story, entitled "Ysrael," the first assertion of aggression (via overly violent behavior) reveals itself quite clearly, as Rafa teaches his younger brother Yuniur this particular expression of masculinity. Hoping to catch a glance of Ysrael's badly deformed face, the boys seek him out and find him wearing American-made clothing and flying an American-made kite, sent to him by his father who left for work in New York. While Ysrael and Yuniur connect over their similar situations because their fathers both live abroad in New York, Rafa cruelly crashes a glass soda bottle over Ysrael's head and removes the mask, simply because he wishes to look at Ysrael's face. Rafa's attack is significant in that it violently asserts his masculinity, because he eliminates a foreign threat to his masculinity through violent behavior. Although he was socially cast aside from the rest of the community because of his deformity, Ysrael still lived a life in a better part of town than Rafa, wore American clothing and played with American toys, and had the promise of living an even better life when American doctors rebuild his face (which would release Ysrael from his locked position in the periphery, consequently raising him to an equal status with normal boys, like Rafa), placing the former in a position of material superiority over the latter. Unwilling to be inferior in any way to the disempowered outcast, Rafa recognized in the otherwise vulnerable Ysrael's material advantages a threat to his masculinity, which could not be left unanswered.

Aside from attacking Ysrael, Rafa also conveys this violent and hostile expression of masculinity by verbally assaulting adults, ridiculing Yuniór for crying (“being a pussy”), and stealing rides on the bus and food from establishments – all while in Yuniór’s presence as if Rafa intends to initiate Yuniór into his construction of masculinity, which continues to be asserted not only by Yuniór but also by mostly all the males throughout the rest of the collection. This violent expression of masculinity is shared by the fatherless Dominican boys, which suggests its existence as a response to the equally forceful U.S. Empire, which physically seized the vulnerable D.R. in 1965 and continued to suppress it by imposing its culture and seducing away the strongest figures, the fathers. In other words, these Dominican boys construct masculinity in a manner highly similar to the seductive aggression of U.S. imperial agenda. What is significant about this reading is that this construction of masculinity is necessary while the boys are still living in their homeland, which challenges Clifford’s definition of diaspora: these males experience a *domestic diaspora*, an experience of the need to conform to U.S. models of behavior and action; that is, no longer is physical dispersion from the homeland necessary to experience alienation from it. Psychological exile from the homeland can produce the feeling of diaspora in a homeland that no longer resembles its former self because of U.S. imperial intrusion. Different than being internal exiles, these boys still long for their true homeland, which can never be restored because the idea of home with its grounding strength in leadership and authority (in the form of their physically strong fathers) that would have someday passed along to them has instead been usurped by an influence that denies their power, Trujillo and his backing, the U.S.

Empire. The domestic diaspora allows for an individual to experience diaspora as Clifford defines it, but no physical dispersion is necessary: an individual may be diasporic within the physical boundaries of his or her homeland so long as there is a psychological separation from the homeland, which has in some way become vulnerable to the agendas of an imposing imperial power, leading to a transformation that distresses its native inhabitants. Certainly, the Dominican fatherless boys – Yuniór, his brother, and their friends – experience this unsettling sense of homelessness while in their homeland, which leads to their frantic attempts at constructing and maintaining a masculinity that mimics the aggressive, seductive strength of the very force that cast them into diaspora.

Constructions of Masculinity in Post-9/11 *Oscar Wao*

While, indeed, Oscar's friend Yuniór and other Dominican male characters in *Oscar Wao* employ hostile aggression and sexual conquering to validate their masculinity, the protagonist of the novel fails to find empowerment in these approaches. Rather than ever truly considering this technique as an appropriate route to empowerment and consequently happiness, sexual conquering is imposed upon Oscar by Yuniór, who boasts that he is “fucking with not one, not two, but three fine-ass bitches at the same time and that wasn't even counting the side-sluts I scooped at the parties and the clubs; me, who had pussy coming out of my ears” (*Oscar Wao* 185). Indeed, Oscar is deemed powerless simply because he never displays the machismo needed to compensate for the power usurped from fatherless male immigrants, like himself. Taking it upon himself to help transition Oscar from impotent hopelessness to dominating control resulting from

machismo, Yunior insistently attempts to initiate Oscar into the highly sexualized expression of masculinity, similar to the way *Drown*'s Rafa attempts to teach masculinity to his younger brother; however, Oscar rejects Yunior's supposedly empowering tactics, insisting that "[i]t's not going to work, Yunior. It ain't going to work if you don't want it to work. I know it's not going to work" (179). Oscar finds difficulty in assimilating to Yunior's construction of masculinity, most likely because it is influenced by Yunior's first-hand encounter with the U.S. Empire before and after emigrating from his homeland, where Oscar did not grow up.

An Americanized second-generation immigrant, having never been raised in the Dominican Republic, Oscar actually feels more American than Dominican. Indeed, in an interview with Diogenes Céspedes and Silvio Torres-Saillant, Díaz comments on the "colonizing" of immigrants while in America, saying, "You come to the United States and the United States begins immediately, systematically, to erase you in every way, to suppress those things which it considers not digestible. You spend a lot of time being colonized" (Céspedes 896). The issue with Oscar, thus, is not that he must reclaim a sense of power, but that because he always lived marginalized and disempowered via detachment from his heritage, he needed to achieve the empowerment through means other than the violent conquering behavior and hyper-sexualized machismo – the way the other Dominican male immigrants sought to discover empowerment through their constructions of masculinity – with which Oscar simply could never identify. Ultimately in post-9/11 *Oscar Wao*, Oscar rejects Yunior's approach that relies on the disempowering of others, seeking instead a purer tactic that does not utilize the

subjugation of others in order to obtain power and thus liberation from the oppressive constraints of diaspora.

Only when Oscar returns to Santo Domingo to visit his grandmother, La Inca, does he experience a turning point in his life. Before one particular trip to Santo Domingo, for example, when his friends would upset him “or drag his trust through the mud he always crawled voluntarily back into the abuse, out of fear and loneliness, something he’d always hated himself for” (33). After the trip, however, Oscar finally shows “some backbone, hence some pride, and although it hurt, it also felt motherfucking good” (33). Yet, although Oscar finally stands up for himself to his friends, he still must settle important issues of identity. Especially at stake in establishing his identity and thus securing empowerment is his nationality, which other “kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. ‘You’re not Dominican.’ And he said, over and over again, But I am. Soy dominicano. Dominicano soy” (49). At this point, Oscar must finally begin, as Díaz says in the aforementioned interview with Céspedes and Torres-Saillant, to decolonize and “in that process, [he can then] relearn names for [himself] that [he] had forgotten” (Céspedes 896). Oscar is able to exactly do just that—relearn names for himself long forgotten—when he spends the summer with his grandmother and mother in Santo Domingo. Having finally returned to Santo Domingo, Oscar is now called Huáscar by everyone; “that was his Dominican name, something else he’d forgotten” (276). Recognized by his true name rather than the Americanized version, this simple change signifies a greater change in identity that is best exemplified in an exchange with his eventual lover, Ybón. When she begs Oscar to

go home, he responds by saying, “But beautiful girl, above all beautiful girls [. . .] This is my home,” to which Ybón counters, “Your real home, mi amor” (318). Oscar’s response (“A person can’t have two?”) (318) signals a distinct and forthcoming change. Once living as an Americanized second-generation immigrant entirely separated from his Dominican roots, Oscar becomes now, instead something like a cosmopolitan, as Bruce Robbins defines the term in his article “Cosmopolitanism: Newer and Newer”: “[s]omething more weighty, positive, and socially grounded than detachment from one’s nation,” but as a mode of “multiple and/or distanced *attachment*” instead (Robbins 51; emphasis mine). Instead of being detached from one or both of his American and Dominican heritages in pursuit of becoming a subject of the globalized world, Oscar insists on first distinguishing the two from one another and then embracing both connections to the nations that shaped his identity, forcing the two to exist in juxtaposition. Oscar’s decision results in his liberating rejection and overthrow of his diasporic experience, resulting in the empowering sense of an unsuppressed identity.

Yes, Oscar’s mission is merely to experience true love and not necessarily to defy a representative of a still corrupt government in hopes of pushing for change; however, in this quest for love he acquires a newer appreciation for his heritage, which largely transforms what could have been yet another puppy-love-obsession-with-the-knockout-next-door (as the situation had been with Maritza, his pre-school love who broke his heart, and Jenni, Oscar’s crush who left him yet again heartbroken) to a meaningful, empowering experience. By willfully returning to the severe beating Oscar received at the hands of the capitán (Ybon’s former lover) and his brutes in order to do the very thing

that would undoubtedly lead him to his death (courting and pursuing Ybón), Oscar's submission to death is yet also a simultaneous defiance of and resistance to the capitán's demands. In his brave and sacrificial death, Oscar becomes a Christ-like figure, and in this new role, Oscar takes upon himself in death the fukú his family suffered and effectively wipes it away. If the fukú was brought by the invading Europeans, and was furthered by diasporic experiences that came as a result of U.S. imperialism, then perhaps Oscar rises above the fukú when he rejects both blind assimilation to Americanism and diasporic homelessness in favor of something like cosmopolitanism, but not quite. He embraces his Dominican heritage, but makes no apologies for his Americanized, nerdy life ("He wanted to blame the books, the sci-fi, but he couldn't—he loved them too much") (50). In that way, he boasts of not one but two homes, effectively becoming more cosmopolitan rather than shackled as psychological exile in diaspora.

When Oscar embraces his Dominican heritage without fully dismissing the American side of his identity, Oscar finds true empowerment and thus a "wondrous" and happy life, however brief it might be. Here is where Clifford's definition of Diaspora is lacking, because it fails to address the Diaspora male experience of the second-generation immigrant whose encounters with the homeland are more performative as opposed to physical. The oftentimes painful actions Oscar undertook to finally embrace the Dominican side of his heritage and identity, by performing his culture in his life without completely dismissing his American heritage, assumes that a choice must be made by the diasporic male to continue and embrace the legacy of home. By distinguishing between the two conflicting cultures which contribute to his identity and then forcing both to exist

in juxtaposition leads to true empowerment without the neocolonial tendencies of assuming the aggressive power of the colonizer that characterize machismo. Oscar's method very clearly differs from *Drown's* Yunior and his aggressive, oversexed masculine identity, which is significant in that whereas the former finds happiness, the latter finds only despair as he psychologically drowns in his submission to the diaspora imposed on him by the aggressive U.S. Empire.

No matter the brevity, Oscar's empowerment is important because his breakthrough allows for the empowerment of others, especially Yunior. One can only hope that the Yunior of *Drown* is the same Yunior in *Oscar Wao*, because he finally achieves a level of happiness at the novel's end. Once *Oscar Wao's* Yunior understands and embraces Oscar's method to discover the nonviolent empowerment Oscar achieves by his resolute rejection and defiance of all forms of oppression (Diasporic restraints, the capitán's physical threat, and U.S. colonization of his identity), Yunior finds stability and empowerment by the novel's end, too, as evidenced by the simple fact that he has written the very novel the reader currently holds. "Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think that's too simple" Yunior writes, arguing that such an assertion "lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like*" (my emphasis, 97). If the power writers wield is not unlike the power dictators possess, then Yunior feels very empowered indeed, perhaps even more so since he considers his novel to be a *zafa*, a counter spell to *fukú*. Given that *fukú* results from the invasion of an aggressive imperial power into vulnerable Dominican Republic, and given that *zafa* is the counter to that

intrusion, this novel—not only a fictional account of resistance but also itself an act of resistance against the U.S. cultural imperialism that haunts this novel—serves as a *zafa* for its writer Yuniors, and of course Díaz, too.

The blurred boundaries between reality and its representations in both of Díaz's works, *Drown* and *Oscar Wao*, ultimately parallel the blurred cultural boundaries between the vulnerable Dominican Republic and the ever-invading nature of the United States. In rejecting the aggressive expression of a masculinity that was created in response to the imperial moves of the U.S. Empire (the aggression of which this perception of masculinity mirrors), Oscar finds a pure way to become empowered, therefore experiencing a life that transcends the hopelessly depressed life his counterpart in *Drown*, Yuniors, experiences, which suggests perhaps an articulation by Díaz for a need in one's resistance to not only reject the imperialism imposed upon oneself, but the very strategies employed in that imperialism, such as targeting and conquering the vulnerable in order to gain power. In that way, one can perhaps move from drowning in the ordinary to transcending to the potentially wondrous.

CHAPTER TWO

POSTCOLONIAL INDIGNATION IN A POST-9/11 WORLD

Invaluable as they are, [traditional approaches to English national identity] cannot be our starting point. They take for granted the very thing that needs investigation: the wider world within which ‘England’ and ‘Englishness’ find their meaning. English national identity cannot be found from within the consciousness of the English themselves. We have to work from the outside in.

Krishan Kumar 18-19

Just as American imperialism – openly hostile in the months and years following the September 11th attacks in New York – has affected and altered the treatment of the diasporic male within the pre-9/11 postcolonial concept of diaspora, the U.S. Empire has also played a role in casting an unlikely nation into a psychological diaspora, England. Drawing on the previous chapter’s discussion of diaspora and the blurring of cultural boundaries between the U.S. cultural imperialism and vulnerable cultures, this discussion will focus on the diasporic nature of the English national identity that fuels its *postcolonial indignation* against the post-9/11 U.S. Empire. This chapter investigates the representations of English identity in Andrea Levy’s pre-9/11 *Small Island* and Joseph O’Neill’s post-9/11 *Netherland*, contending that openly expansive and forceful U.S. imperialism after 9/11 altered Paul Gilroy’s notion of English postcolonial melancholia (which resulted from the fall of the British Empire in the years after the Second World War) into an intense postcolonial indignation against the United States, which is fueled by its psychological Diaspora.

As must be and has been acknowledged, both primary texts take place not only in distinctly different periods, but also in different settings; however, both also reflect Gilroy's concept of postcolonial melancholia. This essay traces the progression from postcolonial melancholia as experienced by England in the years pre-9/11 to the postcolonial indignation experienced by England that has been openly displaced from the geopolitical center by the post-9/11 U.S. Empire. While postcolonial melancholia as Gilroy defines it is in many ways reflected by the tensions between the English and their immigrating colonists in *Small Island*, this essay contends that Gilroy's argument is no longer applicable in a post-September 11th world and offers as evidence *Netherland*, in which the United States is seen as the dominant imperial power that has assumed Britain's former colonists. Indeed, the U.S. acquirement of the very imperial prestige that the British cannot properly mourn so significantly influences the latter's postcolonial melancholia that English resentment is displaced from the "invading" colonial immigrants to the imperial power that absorbed them – yet another obstacle to confront before they can properly mourn the lost Empire and then rebuild a national identity. Such a radical revision of Gilroy's concept suggests, therefore, that enough is at stake in the English people's national identity crisis to justify a return to his original argument in order to indentify U.S. complicity in a contemporary English psychological diaspora, which fuels their postcolonial indignation.

Postcolonial Melancholia: A Pre-9/11 English Identity Crisis

Certainly, far before the Second World War (and, thus, postcolonial melancholia) there existed troubling concerns with English identity that continue today, specifically with the problematic “British” versus “English.” The two very distinctly different terms have been used interchangeably by many, to the irritation of many non-English inhabitants (particularly the Scotch) of the British Isles (Taylor, qtd. in Kumar 3). Acknowledging the very clear distinctions between the two ethnic adjectives, this chapter knowingly addresses only the English and England’s identity crisis, using “British” and “Britain” exclusively to describe the British Empire. Though postcolonial melancholia and other terms may very well extend to the Scots, Welsh, and/or Irish, this chapter concerns itself with only the English identity and the shifts involved in the formation of its national identity in the years following the fall of the British Empire, which the English tended to regard more as their own, as observed by Krishan Kumar in his article “‘English or British? The Question of English National Identity.’”

While “British” and “Britain” are the terms used universally to indicate England, Scotland, and Wales, the English find it frustratingly difficult to refer to themselves as anything but “English.” One likely reason for this difficulty is because England makes up the majority of the British population; however, the most likely cause is the long proud history associated with the name (Kumar 7). As Kumar notes, “England” provokes more of an emotional response to its people, serving as a name “in a way never attained by ‘Britain’ or any of the British derivatives, to focus ideas and ideals. It has been the subject of innumerable eulogies and apostrophes by poets and playwrights” from

Shakespeare to Rupert Brooke (7). Such literary and artistic contributions to the English self-image forever extol England as “the font of freedom and the standard of civilization, a place of virtue as well as of beauty” (8). For the English, then, national identification can only be aligned with the idealistic notions of “England” and “Englishness” that have held steadfast for centuries.

And yet curiously, the English – unlike their Welsh, Scotch, and Irish countrymen – “have traditionally identified themselves with the Union Jack, the composite flag of the United Kingdom, rather than what is technically their flag, the Cross of St George: thereby symbolically claiming the possession of the whole kingdom” (9). That the English people – more so than their non-English countrymen – closely identify more so with the Union Jack (the flag used to represent the entire United Kingdom) than their own flag, despite possessing an aversion to being identified as “British,” suggests an underlying assumption of power as head over the Welsh, Scotch and Irish countrymen on the British Isles. In this sense, rather than representing the United Kingdom, the Union Jack instead represents Englishness and England, the country that binds Welsh, Scots, and Irish together under one flag, which suggests that pre-WWII English more so than their non-English countrymen possessed a profound sense of entitlement to their powerful Empire, a prideful claim that further buoyed an already idealized notion of the English homeland.

The post-WWII fall of the British Empire (or perhaps presumed by those in England, the English Empire), however, further complicated the aforementioned conflicts with identity, thrusting the English people into a national identity crisis. Indeed, Krishan

Kumar that the Empire's fall left the English both vulnerable and thrust them into obscurity:

Gone are the cosy assumptions of 'Englishness', with its sleepy villages and ancestral piles. They have gone because the empire has gone, and so has British economic power. They have gone because the English are not even safe in their homelands, challenged as they are by the rise of Celtic nationalism and by the claims of 'multiculturalism' within English society. [. . .] In whichever direction they look, the English find themselves called upon to reflect upon their identity, and to re-think their position in the world. The protective walls that shielded them from these questions are all coming down. (19)

In the face of the Empire's deterioration, the English face an identity crisis that rendered them resentful of and simultaneously powerless to hinder the multicultural environment England quickly became. The English's reaction, termed by Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*, provides a particularly interesting shift in the shaping of their identity, and thus forms the center of this chapter's discussion.

As described in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Gilroy's concept refers to the pioneering work of German psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich who endeavored to understand postwar West Germany's melancholic reactions the sudden loss of both their beloved Hitler and the imperial prestige their nation could no longer claim (qtd. in Gilroy 98). The Mitscherlichs argued that a loss of a "fantasy of omnipotence" prompts melancholic reactions, suggesting that "the racial and national

fantasies that imperial and colonial power required were, like those of the Aryan master race, predominantly narcissistic” (99). Gilroy finds in the Mitscherlichs’ argument a close parallel to twenty-first century Britain, which also wrestles with the loss of its imperial prestige.

Indeed, Gilroy contends that the British people are overshadowed by the demise of their own empire and the consequent loss of imperial prestige. Once the history of the empire became a source of “discomfort, shame, and perplexity,” that unsettling history was “diminished, denied, and then, if possible, actively forgotten” by the country, rather than its feelings confronted (90). As a result, the country’s guilt-ridden loathing and depression characterizes its xenophobic response to the immigration of its formerly colonized peoples (90). Gilroy asserts that the British must first understand and appreciate the brutalities of colonial rule enacted for their benefit, so as to confront not only their depression at their imperial loss, but also the troubling sense of complicity before they can begin to build a new national identity “from the debris of their broken narcissism” (99). Once Britons come to terms with this “paralyzing guilt,” they must then transform it into a more “productive shame” that would be conducive to the building of “a multicultural nationality that is no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to either strangers or otherness” (99). In other words, this ailment can never be resolved until the British people come to terms with its loss of empire, which will lead to a decrease in their xenophobic treatment of immigrating peoples from former colonies and perhaps an embracing of a multicultural environment—an atmosphere that seems hopelessly unattainable at the end of 1948 Britain in Levy’s pre-9/11 *Small Island*.

Levy's pre-9/11 *Small Island*: The Beginnings of English Diaspora

Nicknamed “Pop” by his fellow soldiers in the Royal Air Force (RAF) because of his antiquated reverence for the British Empire and the notion of its superiority, Bernard Bligh serves as a symbolic embodiment of his beloved England in the years just before, during, and after the Second World War. For example, when Bernard muses over rumors of an independent India, he smugly imagines “that ragged bunch of illiterates wanted to run their own country” (Levy 308). Indeed, Bernard rejects the notion of a post-British India: “The British out of India? Only British troops could keep those coolies under control. A job well jobbed – all agreed” (308). When his fellow soldiers grumble, “We’re being used [. . .] to prop up the British Empire,” he speaks out against the men who “run down” his country, declaring, “I, for one, am proud to be part of the British Empire. Proud to represent decency” (311). Bernard’s unwavering devotion to and love of his country are seen as an outdated reverence that must soon confront the quickly deteriorating nature of his Empire with India’s partition in 1947, an event which sends Bernard into a spiral of wandering depression that renders him unable to mourn the loss of his Empire. This inability translates into the resentment of non-English, former colonists who Bernard encounters outside and inside England. Constantly serving as a reminder of Great Britain’s imperial prestige, and at the same time a reminder of the atrocities committed for the maintenance of the Empire, Bernard’s racist attitude toward and treatment of former colonists outside of England first reveals the beginnings of the postcolonial melancholia with which he struggles for the remainder of the novel.

As Bernard experiences his beloved Empire's increasing deterioration, he falls into depression, and soon his antiquated ideals must confront the overwhelming guilt and self-loathing that Gilroy argues accompanied Britons' realization of the atrocities committed for the preservation of their Empire. Such a confrontation comes at the end of a significant scene in the novel when Bernard employs the services of a child prostitute in Calcutta, whom he viciously forces to submit to sexual intercourse in a violent position that overpowers and subjugates her, wrapping her hair "tight in my fist. Her head, wrenched back, was baring its teeth in a rectal gape" (Levy 340). After releasing the girl and watch her dash away from him as though he were monstrous, Bernard experiences a profound, guilt-ridden paralyzation for his atrocious treatment of the Calcutta prostitute, who only then did he finally realize that she was "nothing but a girl. Surely no more than fifteen. No younger. Fourteen or even twelve. A small girl. Hadn't noticed this before. [. . .] But now the fear in her black eyes – harmless as a baby's – was denouncing me as depraved. What was I doing?" (340). After Bernard attempts to comfort the young girl by explaining his English ethnicity and, thus, naturally ingrained civility ("I'm an Englishman,' I explained. 'In the RAF. Back home I was a bank clerk. It's a very responsible position. I'm a married man, you see. An Englishman . . . me English-man' (341)), the resulting uncomfortable realization that his being an Englishman explains exactly his "beast[ly]" behavior spurs an overwhelming moment of profound self-disgust and agony: "It was then, as if from nowhere, a sob fierce as a child's rose in me. I gulped for air. Mouth open – a long, breathless pause ended with the release of an anguished howl. Great spasms convulsed through me. My hands trembled. I covered my face.

Gasped for more breath, which came in short bursts of pitiable whimpering” (341). Bernard’s sorrowful distress of his violent treatment of a vulnerable child can be read as national allegory: it parallels the agonizing shame that accompanies the realization of the atrocities committed for the betterment of the Empire. Just as Bernard engaged in a violent, sexual conquest of a vulnerable girl for the fleeting moment of superiority (not unlike the sexual conquering nature of *machismo* discussed in the previous chapter), the British Empire similarly subjugated and overpowered – oftentimes violently – vulnerable cultures to empower its Empire.

These conquests, however beneficial to the Empire, triggered within its British subjects a deeply embedded, self-loathing shame, which when repressed ultimately fueled the xenophobic treatment of formerly colonized immigrants (Gilroy 94). Though Bernard as representative of England feels disgust over his behavior, he represses this profound self-loathing and instead displaces his anger on his victim, the child prostitute in Calcutta. This becomes immediately apparent when Bernard cruelly swats away her comforting pats on his shoulder, throwing the money “at the wretched whore” as he left (341). When Bernard discovers an “angry postule on [his] penis” (Levy 343), however, he immediately blames the tremendously painful and life-threatening sore on his victim, blindly insisting to himself the responsibility for syphilis, as he thinks, lay squarely on her shoulders and not at all on his own: “The inevitable result of my sexual relations with the wrong type. A small girl with black eyes harmless as a baby’s. The wretched whore in Calcutta – *still clinging on me*” (my emphasis, 344). More disgusting than the actual act of soiling himself by interacting with “the wrong type” (for Bernard, the wrong type is

certainly a non-English individual) is the notion of painfully constant reminder of this indiscretion that very well may lead to his death. Bernard's disgust symbolically represents that of his homeland's: their cruel treatment of former colonists comes as a result of their serving as a physical, constant reminder of the "violent, dirty, and immoral business" of British imperialism, thereby leading Britons to displace their self-hatred onto the victims of their former imperialist agendas (Gilroy 94). This displacement becomes immediately apparent in the English xenophobic response to immigrating former colonists.

Bernard's return home years after WWII signifies the English's inevitable confrontation with the state of their homeland after the fall of their Empire and the subsequent immigration of former colonists who settled in the English homeland: "Hard to believe this had been my home for most of my life. Nothing was familiar. Had it always looked so exhausted? So friable? Buildings decaying and run down. Rotting sashes. Cracked plaster. Obscene gaps where houses once stood" (343). Bernard, representative of his English countrymen, mistakes the toll his Empire and the war has had on the homeland for the seeming invasion of former colonists that appear to leave England in ruins from its former glory, a response noted in Gilroy's discussion of postcolonial melancholia. "Repressed and buried knowledge of the cruelty and injustice that recur in diverse accounts of imperial administration," Gilroy argues, "can only be denied at a considerable moral and psychological cost. That knowledge creates a discomfiting complicity" which actively informs the English "hostile responses to strangers and settlers and in constructing the intractable political problems that flow from

understanding immigration as being akin to war and invasion” (94). In other words, the English attempted to stifle knowledge of atrocities enacted for the glory of the Empire, but the complicity that exists as a result of that knowledge fuels equally atrocious, xenophobic behavior towards immigrants that settle in their homeland.

When Bernard realizes that in his absence his wife took the initiative to rent out spare rooms in his childhood home to immigrants, he immediately blames the house’s deterioration on the immigrants, insisting to himself that “[t]hese coloured people don’t have the same standards. I’d seen it out east. Not used to our ways. When in Rome . . . Lost on these immigrants,” refusing to believe otherwise (388). Bernard especially treats Jamaican male immigrant Gilbert Joseph cruelly, furious that Gilbert now rents out and resides in a room in the Bligh household. Bernard believes that Gilbert, like his invading countrymen, is inferior and thus should not live as an equal within his home: “The war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind,” Bernard explains, “Everyone had a place. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people. [. . .] Everyone was trying to get home after the war to be with kith and kin. Except these blasted coloured colonials. I’ve nothing against them in their place. But their place isn’t here” (388-89). Significantly, when Bernard’s wife Queenie gives birth to a mixed race child, Bernard immediately places the blame on the Jamaican immigrant. After a brief and bloody scuffle, Gilbert assures Bernard he had nothing to do with Queenie’s pregnancy: “I sorry for you. But this business is nothing to do with me” (403). Bernard, however, significantly responds to Gilbert, mumbling, “It’s everything to do with you. You and your kind” (403). While Gilbert is not personally to blame for any

embarrassment or pain Bernard may feel, the Englishman is resolute in projecting all of his hate and frustration onto the Other who has invaded his home. Indeed, Queenie's illegitimate child may represent for Bernard not only the embarrassment of being made a cuckold, but also the breaking down of a pure English race, and thus the deterioration of their imperial greatness. Certainly on a larger scale, it would seem that Bernard serves as a representative of collective English depression over the loss of their Empire, and its manifestation in the xenophobic response to formerly colonized immigrants, which is especially noticeable when Bernard returns to find his childhood home falling apart.

I should mention here (briefly for the time being, but to be picked up and more thoroughly discussed later in this chapter) that Bernard's irritation with his house and country – for which he so desperately yearned to return, so as to finally be reconciled with the stability of his mythologized homeland, which now no longer resembles itself in appearance and its housing of non-English inhabitants – signals the beginnings of a provocative shift in English identity. Bernard, and symbolically England, at this point after WWII begins to feel psychologically out of place in his own home. Even Gilbert can sense the feeling of homelessness in Bernard, explaining that he recognized a feature on Bernard's face that he saw everyday on his own face, the face of an immigrant: "I know it like a foe. Come, I saw it reflected from every mirror on my dear Jamaican island. Staring back on me from my own face. Residing in the white of the eye, the turn of the mouth, the thrust of the chin," the marks of what Gilbert calls, "[a] *bewildered soul. Too much seen to go back. Too much changed to know which way is forward*" (368; emphasis mine). The postcolonial melancholic effect on English identity as represented by Bernard

developed a domestic diaspora (see previous chapter), further complicating the already existent English national identity crisis that finds additional strain in response to ever-growing multicultural environment in England.

Continuing with Gilroy's rubric for postcolonial melancholia, if Bernard symbolizes British depression and resulting xenophobia, Queenie certainly symbolizes her country's embarrassment of Imperial deeds, which is manifest in her attempts to embrace the formerly colonized (particularly Gilbert and her lover, Michael) and failures to fully do so. Queenie's inability to fully embrace the formerly colonized is reflected in the racism underlying her conversations with Hortense and her voluntarily giving—indeed, begging Hortense and Gilbert to take—her mixed race baby away. Queenie's mixed race baby symbolizes the multiculturalism with which Britons were confronted after the Second World War. Although Bernard at one point near the novel's end seemingly considers embracing the child as his own, Queenie refuses to allow him to accept the child, significant in that her plea symbolically reveals her homeland's inability to fully embrace the notion of a multicultural nation, which instead of a new beginning would be an embarrassing burden:

He's coloured, Bernard. [. . .] You might think you can do it now while he's a little baby saying nothing. But what about when he grows up? A big, strapping coloured lad. And people snigger at you in the street and ask you all sorts of awkward questions. [. . .] I haven't got the guts for it. I thought I would. I should have but I haven't got the spine. Not for that fight. I admit it, I can't face it, and I'm his blessed mother. (431-32)

Therefore, Gilbert and Hortense, rather than Bernard and Queenie, are forced to embrace the mixed race child, simply because to the latter couple he is inconvenient and would be out of place of the their English lifestyle. On a larger level, then, the formerly colonized rather than the English must accept the multicultural environment after WWII, which suggests that the English had trouble accepting their quickly evolving England. This resistance is reflected in Gilroy's correct assertion that the English suffered (and continue to suffer, although in the altered form of *postcolonial indignation*, later discussed in this chapter) from postcolonial melancholia, which manifests the British people's inability to mourn the collapse of its Empire in their resistance to accept the immigration of formerly colonized peoples.

And yet, one element to the story in *Small Island* complicates Bernard and Queenie's (and, thus, England's) postcolonial melancholia: an American shot and killed Bernard's father. Finally returning to his house after his years in Brighton, Bernard notices the loss of his father's presence as soon as he enters his decrepit home, unconsciously knowing that in his absence his father had died. Significantly, Bernard's father's death was at the hand of an American, as Queenie informs her husband: "Shot by Yanks. A Yank shot him. But it was all hushed away. No one was even asked why they did it. No Trial. Nothing. His brain all over the pavement. And they just cleaned it up, gave me the pieces and carried on as if nothing had happened" (Levy 354). If Bernard represents the English in the years during and after WWII, his father could indeed represent the glory years of the formidable British Empire. His messy, unanswered death at the hands of an American, and disaster left behind for Queenie certainly reveals the

deeply involved role the U.S. played in the dismantling of the British Empire after WWII, a role previously investigated in the introduction to this thesis. The English response to U.S. responsibility for breaking apart their Empire is silenced, perhaps in part because of their status as allies and victors, but also because the English are distracted by their displacement in their own country as a result of immigration of former colonists, who serve as a constant reminder of the atrocities enacted for the betterment of the Empire. It is only after the U.S. unveils itself as an openly aggressive, expansionist force in the years following the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks does the phenomenon of postcolonial melancholia become altered, and English Diaspora come into existence.

O'Neill's Post-9/11 *Netherland*: Postcolonial Indignation and English Diaspora

Literature published after the 9/11 attacks portrays a curious shift in the English national identity crisis, largely because of the British people's reaction to the openly aggressive and expansionist nature of the U.S. Having been psychologically displaced from their central position of dominance to the geopolitical periphery by the U.S. Empire, the English maintain a mythologized memory for the homeland's "finest hour" to which they (as represented by *Small Island*'s Bernard) desperately long to return, a yearning that certainly informs their xenophobic responses to the former colonialists of the British Empire whose presence in the Mother Country has physically altered England. As a result, there exists now an English psychological diaspora, which profoundly fuels their *postcolonial indignation* against their usurper, the U.S. Empire. Indeed, the post-9/11 U.S. imperial moves as rendered in *Netherland* serve as a distraction to the British

postcolonial melancholia, altering the terms of their Diasporic experience and, thus, significantly altering the terms of Gilroy's concept. Indeed, the U.S.'s acquisition of the imperial prestige that the English find difficult to mourn so significantly influences the latter's postcolonial melancholic condition that British resentment is displaced from the "invading" colonial immigrants to the imperial power that absorbed them – a furtherance of their inability to mourn the lost Empire.

While postcolonial melancholia finds exemplification in *Small Island* through Queenie and Bernard's imposition of the mixed race baby upon Gilbert and Hortense, the anxiety also manifests itself in Britain's feelings toward the United States. The troubling knowledge of "what is actually involved in being on the receiving end of imperial power" finds ultimate expression in the country's "intermittent fears of itself becoming a colonial dependency of the United States" (Gilroy 92), an anxiety that finds articulation in Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*. Indeed, narrator Hans van den Broek's English wife, Rachel, who is the true articulation of British melancholy and frustration, vocally expresses such a fear. For example, she struggles with the shameful history and yet depressing loss of the British Empire through her rage over the United States' apparently imperialist decision to invade Iraq. In her telephone conversation with her estranged husband, Rachel argues that the United States is "now the strongest military power in the world. It can and will do anything it wants. It has to be stopped" (O'Neill 98). Rachel goes on to describe the United States as a country whose masses and leaders suffered from "extraordinary and self-righteous delusions" about its country, the world, and "thanks to the influence of the fanatical evangelical Christian movement, the universe, delusions that had the effect of

exempting the United States from the very rules of civilized and lawful and rational behavior it so mercilessly sought to enforce on others” (95-96). In defining the U.S. as today’s great world power, whose imposition of beliefs and culture on other peoples possess “no legal or moral authority” (97), Rachel unconsciously identifies the contemporary imperial power that is the United States with the Imperial Britain of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Calling the U.S. a “mentally ill, sick, unreal” country (95) and railing against specifically its superior perception of itself and its Christian beliefs allow Rachel to confront her guilt over and then openly condemn the shameful practices the British employed while expanding its empire.

At the same time, however, Rachel expresses her anxiety over U.S. cultural imperialism and its potential to squeeze out Britain’s cultural importance when she refuses to allow her son to “grow up with the American perspective,” which she seems to believe marginalizes every nation, including Britain, ultimately leading to the unfathomable: one being unable to “point to Britain on a map” (96). Frightened by the idea of her country’s marginalization at the hands of American Imperialism, Rachel sees the war on Iraq as the beginning of a larger attack on the world, aiming to “destroy international law and order as we know it and replace it with the global rule of American force” (96). At one point in her argument, she equates this aggression with the attempt at global domination Adolf Hitler attempted, despite her backtracking when her husband astutely articulates her assumption. By equating the Bush administration in the United States with the Nazi party in Germany, Rachel evokes an anti-Nazi emotional appeal, what Gilroy accuses Great Britain of continuously doing. Gilroy notes that the troubled

memory of British Imperialism “appears to have been collapsed into the overarching figuration of Britain at war against the Nazis, under attack, yet stalwart and ultimately triumphant” (Gilroy 89). Britain’s continued citation of the anti-Nazi war as a “privileged point of entry into national identity and self-understanding,” Gilroy argues, “reveals a desire to find a way back to the point where the national culture [. . .] was, irrespective of the suffering involved in the conflict, both comprehensible and habitable” (89). By asserting an anti-American sentiment that is reminiscent of British anti-Nazism, Rachel evokes the sense of pride and triumph felt by the “stalwart” Britain that survived Nazi attacks in the Second World War. This unconscious identification with Britain allows Rachel to express her nationalist pride in being British, and perhaps suggests a further pang of sadness over losing its imperialist prestige.

Rachel’s postcolonial melancholy finds expression in her voiced anxiety over the United States’ imperialist gains, in which she essentially defines the U.S. as an imperialist power in the same terms one could describe the British Empire: the largest world power dominating other cultures without legal or moral authority. With this assertion, Rachel is seemingly able to sort through the guilt-ridden loathing derived from the shameful history of British Imperialism and, yet, also her depression connected to the demise of the empire. And yet, why—after Rachel is seemingly able to confront the anxieties that seemingly are behind the fragmenting of her family—is the plot not then quickly resolved, leading to reconciliation? Why, then, does the narrative continue for another 150 pages, divulging into a completely different tale, involving a completely different person? Because Rachel has yet to come to terms with her resentment for the

U.S.'s usurping of her country's imperial prestige, she has yet to truly come to terms with the loss of the British Empire. In other words, in identifying the U.S.'s imperial actions—which are not unlike those of the British Empire—as “diseased,” Rachel begins to confront her unresolved feelings of depression at the loss of her country's Empire; however, she is far too overwhelmed by her deep resentment of the U.S.'s usurping of her country's imperial prestige that she is unable to fully come to terms with her loss. This displacement of resentment from invading immigrants to a usurping imperial power suggests a radical revision of Gilroy's notion of postcolonial melancholia to include embittered jealousy towards the United States, which absorbs Britain's formerly colonized people, as represented by Chuck Ramkissoon, an immigrant from Trinidad.

Chuck's fanatic obsession with everything U.S. firmly illustrates his being absorbed into American culture, thereby essentially neutralizing his heritage, which indeed has ties to the former British Empire. His becoming Americanized is apparent to anyone who happens to cross paths with him: for example, he often wears his New York Yankees cap, a clear image of the U.S. as it not only refers to “the American pastime,” baseball, but also that the name “Yankee” is an often used nickname for Americans. Also, Chuck drives a 1996 Cadillac, noteworthy in that it is plastered with all things American: “banners and stickers of the Stars and Stripes and yellow ribbons in support of the troops” (74). Furthermore, Chuck admits that his interest in naturalism finds roots in his Trinidadian childhood; however, most significant about this disclosure is that Chuck feels that this interest was heightened by the knowledge he gained from “enthusiastic and successful” studying for the U.S. citizenship exams (75). Certainly, the mere fact that

Chuck is a lover of what he argues is “the first modern team sport of America” (101), Cricket (which he claims is deeply rooted in the American DNA, despite its being known generally as an English sport) (102), shows that Chuck wants to be fully accepted as American: if he can be associated with everything that is purely and historically American, than he can become purely American. Chuck’s insistence to claim the U.S. as his homeland rather than Trinidad is most relevant to this discussion in that he essentially dismisses the former British colony in favor of being absorbed into the newest and most powerful Empire, the U.S. Such an attempt would also effectively eradicate any lingering vestiges of British imperial dominance, which further complicates and exacerbates the British people’s, as represented by Rachel, already repressed depression and guilt, thereby exacerbating and extending their postcolonial melancholia.

U.S. imperial dominance after September 2001, therefore, poses a threat to English national identity in that its allegedly unrivaled imperial status has the capability to thoroughly eliminate any lingering remnants of English (via the British Empire) imperial prominence, which the English people have yet to properly mourn. The rise of a well-established empire, which seems not to be going anywhere any time soon, has frustrated the English so much that their resentment of the American Empire has radically altered their postcolonial melancholia: before the English can even begin to confront their postcolonial melancholia in order to heal as a nation, they must first confront their postcolonial indignation, an underlying, collective resentment felt towards the United States for the absorption of former colonists of the British Empire and, thus, stripped imperial strength. Once having confronted both their postcolonial indignation and

melancholia, the English can build a new national identity for which Gilroy calls; however, until then U.S. imperialism continues to shape the aggression underlying the English national identity, which will continue to respond to the aggressive nature of the U.S. Empire. Likely one of the few nations able to offer genuine attempts in holding the U.S. accountable for any future potentially negative imperialist campaigns, Great Britain must first come to terms with its postcolonial indignation and then melancholia because enough is at stake.

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