

NARRATING THE POSTCOLONIAL LANDSCAPE: ARCHAEOLOGIES OF RACE AT HADRIAN'S WALL

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper seeks to outline heritage narratives of the frontier landscape of Hadrian's Wall from the perspective of postcolonial race-geographies. Through the process of curating the exhibition *An Archaeology of Race* (<http://www.dur.ac.uk/geography/race/>) there have emerged new modes of knowing this landscape through a lens of mapping race. This paper will engage with the narrative form as a tool of *doing* postcolonial history of the northern frontier defined by Hadrian's Wall. The latter section of the paper focuses on the exhibition which consolidates a narrative which is situated in the nexus of material cultures, archaeological scholarship and critical race-geography. The aim here is to present the 'black' history of this heritage landscape situated within the political context of doing archaeologies of landscape (Witcher *et al*, 2010). This approach highlights the international geographies and cultures that accumulate at this monument in the form of a public exhibition.

KEYWORDS: Landscape, Race, Exhibition, Heritage, Septimius Severus, Archaeology, Narrative

## NARRATING THE POSTCOLONIAL LANDSCAPE: ARCHAEOLOGIES OF RACE AT HADRIAN'S WALL

### *Archaeologies of Race, Blackness and the 'Aethiope'*

Various temporalities are embedded in the landscape of Hadrian's Wall, some privileged over others in both popular heritage and academic histories. In this paper a critical postcolonial approach is taken to the archaeological and geographical narratives linked to this site. These interrogations have led to dissemination of this re-narrativisation, in the form of a museum exhibition entitled *An Archaeology of Race* (<http://dur.ac.uk/geography/race/>) curated by Claire Nesbitt and myself. This major exhibition was linked to the AHRC funded project entitled *Tales of the Frontier: postcolonial readings of Hadrian's Wall* (<http://www.dur.ac.uk/roman.centre/hadrianswall/>), where the geographical and archaeological landscape cultures of this monument were interrogated using a postcolonial lens. The exhibition embodies a political project of public engagement and public geographies in practice (Fuller, 2008). In summer 2009, 11,000 visitors attended the exhibition and the website received over 500 hits a week. The exhibition in practice attends to a narrative of British landscape by embracing a postcolonial frame, which embodies *heritage for all* (DCMS, 1999). There is a politics to linking theories of anti-racism into a publicly engaged practice. As Madge et.al (2009) argue academics whose expertise is built on postcolonial, critical race-theory or indeed radical cultural geography do need to extend their politics beyond the page, towards an 'ethics in praxis' (Raghuram et al 2009; Tolia-Kelly, 2009). Here, what is presented is an attempt at keeping heritage dynamic and live, a politics of doing public geographies (Ward, 2006) with care (Fuller and Askins, 2007; Fuller, 2008) and responsibility (Jazeel and Mcfarlane, 2010). This commitment has enabled the narrative events to which the museums, curators and scholars who have collaborated on in *An archaeology of Race* to be kept alive through the teaching on citizenship in schools, the free web access to the exhibition panels, as well as the touring exhibition that continues in Durham University museums in October 2010. Each contact with folk thus engenders a re-imagining, re-narrating and re-membering our historical past which feeds into our present and inclusive landscapes narratives of nation.

The re-narrativisation in the exhibition includes the representing of 'black' history along this fortified frontier. The exhibition evidences the mobilities and presence of international personnel, including the black African presence, situating this UNESCO world heritage site as part of an *international* Roman limes. Also presented are the movement of technologies, materials, peoples and cultures within Roman territory. 'black' in this paper refers to the political definition of black as 'other', non-Occidental, and in terms of history and heritage the narration of those histories that are marginalised, occluded and often re-presented. The exhibition's narrative addresses questions of nation and race (Crampton, 2003). Narrative here is considered here as always *interpretive*, partial and in-process (Hayden-White, 1978). Through narrative, the exhibition, counters interpretations of the landscape through an Imperial British identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly an Orientalist account (Said, 1979; 1993); '(T)he main battle(s) in imperialism . . . were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative' (1993, xiii), thus narrative becomes a tool for a political, historical and cultural ideology in the recording of landscape history.

*An Archaeology of Race* aims to address how a post colonial engagement with the material cultures, landscape and iconography, can unravel the layerings of narratives of 'strangers', 'others', and 'blackness', a project at the heart of Hall's (1999) call for a renewed cultural heritage narrative of nation that challenges those valorised cultural narratives that subsume the 'other' (Said, 1983,12), sometimes violently (Said 1983, 47). The intention has been to avoid the compounding of contemporary notions of 'race' with Greco-Roman political and representational culture. The politics of landscape and race are represented within the exhibition panels, written by scholars in the field. My aim has been threefold; firstly to attempt a recovery of the fact of black presence in an early British landscape of the north-east, thus disturbing those accepted notions of this landscape being one that is homogeneous and remote both culturally and geopolitically. The figuring of Septimius Severus as an African Emperor of Rome living in the North and rebuilding the Wall as part of his consolidation of the northern frontier recovers a story for the public imagination, local landscape history and contributes to a schedule of teaching on Roman Britain as part of the citizenship curriculum in schools. Severus here is positioned as a black figure in British history. Despite the several great museums within the region, both, national and international perspectives on the empire has been consolidated in a

representational field that privileges 'whiteness' (Dyer, 1997; Bonnett, 1997). Romaness as both Black and African are seemingly discordant within this regime of heritage narratives. To rearticulate this multicultural history and to reclaim some ground here, citizenship, race and Roman history have been developed into a teaching pack for schools and scheduled on their 'citizenship' curriculum. These were sponsored by Durham City Council's schools inspector for geography and history and written by the race equality in schools team, (EMTAS).

Secondly the postcolonial lens unravels the link between the role of archaeology as being instrumental in shaping narratives on the Wall as being part of a national programme of inherited and rightful Great Britishness, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The establishing the discipline of archaeology in this period, was contemporary with the aligning of a culture of British Imperial greatness with the narratives of a successful Imperial Rome (Hingley, 2000). The cultural and political process of coupling these in the national imaginary effectively conflate the British Imperial occidental project with that of Roman notions of citizenship and civility. Overall, elisions are implied between those active geopolitical race hierarchies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Roman narratives of civic superiority. This is despite the dominant Classicist interpretation of Greco-Roman societal relations as being devoid of racial hierarchies (Snowden, 1970; 1983). Figures of blacks proliferate throughout the Classical texts and material cultures, however, '(T)he Greek and Roman profile of Ethiopians remained basically unchanged from Homer to the end of Classical literature-that image was essentially favourable' (Snowden, 1983, 55). 'Ethiopians' in Snowden's terms designates persons of varying degrees of blackness, applied by Greeks and Romans to types of 'the Negroid race' (Snowden 1970,7). Thompson (1989) also attests that 'Roman attitudes towards *Aethiopes* even at their most negative, have nothing to do with the familiar modern phenomenon of race and are of a kind very different from those commonly described by social scientists by the terms 'racist', 'racial prejudice', 'colour prejudice' and 'racism'. (157). Thompson states that '(T)he relevant iconography contains an element of caricature of blacks but in general the representations of blacks (found mostly on small utilitarian objects like earrings and terracotta lamps) suggests an absence of anti-black xenophobia and a tendency on the part of owners and users of these objects to take blacks for granted, at least in those localities where blacks were actually a familiar part of the social

scene (in other localities the dominant suggestion would be a vogue for the exotic)' (1989,7). Unravelling in Snowden and Thompson's cultural frameworks are definable forms of race stereotyping in their discourses of *strangers* (Ahmed, 2000), *others* (Said, 1979), and the *exotic* (Hall, 1997). Alongside these examples are several critiques of Classical antiquarianism being implicated in a particular set of interpretations of artefacts through a 19<sup>th</sup> century racialised lens (Isaac, 2004; Bernal, 1987).

Over time the developing iconography of the Wall has come to define this as a national monument built by Emperor Hadrian, where the particular formation of ethnicities of Romaness undergo a whitening narrative occluding 'other' ethnic histories embedded in this landscape. Interestingly, both Hadrian and Septimius are marked in terms of ethnicity and culture; Hadrian had Spanish links and held a deep love of Greek culture and Septimius was born an African in Libya, with all the education and training necessary to be seen to be of Roman (Latin) culture and citizenry (Birley, 2008). Both are celebrated Imperial civilisers in their own right. As the formerly painted busts of Hadrian lose their aesthetic signifiers of identity, and the narrations of Roman Britain too become pale. This slow denudation of the complexity and diversity privileges certain 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural values as part of a new self-fashioning of Britishness. The effect of this enables Hadrian to be ubiquitously celebrated as Roman Emperor and builder of the Wall, than the Severan legacy of military rule and residency.

The role of archaeology in securing heritage and national landscape narratives, is not benign, this fact is exemplified in the consolidation of Israel as described by Nadia Abu El-Haj (2001), below

'In producing the material signs of national history that became visible and were witnessed across the contemporary landscape, archaeology repeatedly remade the colony into an ever expanding national terrain. It substantiated the nation in history and produced Eretz Yisrael as the national home' (2001, 280)

The frontier landscape of Hadrian's Wall is one where accounts of 'English' and 'British' heritage, landscape, and national culture are encountered in the Roman heritage tourism literature, in media images of Hadrian's Wall, and the British Museums' own national touring exhibitions. The national landscape cultures of the Roman Wall garner questions of who is 'civil' and who is 'barbarian'; who is savage and who is not, these are

intrinsic to the history of Roman rule and the identities within this region; these have relied on colonial accounts of ‘fixity’ of identity (Bhabha, 1983) i.e. narrow accounts of ‘Briton’ and ‘Roman’. Narrations of nation are interwoven with systems of representations (Hall, 1997) forming historical ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980, p131). The focus on race here is inevitably partial, yet remains an essential narrative, given the effect on the British population when alienated from encounters with exclusive accounts of British history. Livingstone (2002, citing Gadamer) describes the moment of non-recognition thus ‘(W)hen we encounter meanings not accessible or recognisable, results in a state of alienation’ (2002,79; see also Hall, 1999) The recognition of the detrimental effect of these fissures have given rise to several government policies, in this area and initiatives such as *Black History Month* and *heritage for all* (Tolia-Kelly and Crang, forthcoming 2010).

*Romaness* in narrations of the national past is often wrongly perceived to be a homogeneous culture explained through a (now contested) process of *Romanisation* (Haverfield, 1905). Celebrations of Roman Imperial strength, and of both nation-building, and imperial civilising, are consolidated through historical and antiquarian accounts as well as in pictures, dioramas, re-enactments and heritage publicity. These public historiographies are distinctly bound up with the development of antiquarian societies themselves and of archaeological evidence becoming foundational to British history (Freeman, 1997, p45). Often when Romans are presented to us in the public sphere they are mediated through a particular British Imperialist ideological lens. However, there is contradiction between dominant accounts and other scholarship (Hingley and Unwin, 2005) which has evidenced *Romaness* to be varied, challenging historical accounts and presented as competing historical accounts (Tenney 1916; Harrison, 1998; Gosden, 2006; Mattingly 1994, 1997; Millet, 1990).

Included in these variations, are notions of the Roman Empire as having ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ cultures, or even a ‘colour-blind’ approach to cultural difference (race, religion, language and social background). These colour-blind versions of Roman culture are also challenged by writers (Bernal 1987; Díaz-Andreu, 2007; Isaac, 2004). Webster (2001) promotes a postcolonial theorisation in her account of *creolisation* that figures the cultural exchanges and expression between coloniser and colonised as being bound up in a process of ‘resistant adaptation’, where ‘new ethnicities emerge to accommodate old and new’ (p218). Creolisation, is

radical in its attentiveness to the material cultures as well as those bodies outside of the lens of Roman archaeologists that have gone before. Webster (2001) challenges 19<sup>th</sup> century interpretations that ignore cultural exchange (Haverfield, 1905), as those which are figured around the elite (Hingley, 2000).

Scholarly accounts, texts and narrations of Roman society have themselves reflected the political context within which they are recorded; their histories are as significant as the history being told of. Thus the role of British Imperialism itself has shaped Roman history, as with any account of historical narration, the history told is one narration of many that could be told. Despite published evidence (Allason-Jones, 1989) and scholarly works such as Anthony Birley's (2008 [1988]), accounts of ethnicity and migration continue buried in dominant narratives in the public domain. The exhibition's narrative attends to these processes of folding, loss and burial of accounts of mobility of peoples during Imperial rule and during colonisation, as a means to record a post-colonial race-geography of this British (UNESCO) World Heritage Site. Narrative in this regard is central to the presentation of history in the museum space, especially when there are contrary, complex accounts within academic scholarship.

### **Narrative and National History**

Tourist landscapes, archaeological sites and national identity are intrinsically co-narrated as part of national *history*, narrative powerfully operates beyond the economic and material site (Tuan, 1991). Contemporary writers on these processes using a postcolonial approach (Harvey, 2003; 2007) have argued that the 'national' and 'history' often get skewed to fit a cultural reaction to a societies place in the world. For Hazbun (2008) reflecting on Carthagoland (a Hannibal inspired theme park) in Tunisia, argues that cultural spending is driven forward to claim a national identity using mythology to ensure 'a distinctive, territorially rooted identification for the nation's external image.' (p70). The mythology here is that Hannibal has suited a current pluralistic agenda on national identity, which veers away from the definition of nation through 'Arab' or 'Islamic' identities. In Britain too, both geography and archaeology have been at the heart of narrating national history, which includes mythologies; their disciplinary histories too have been consolidated as part of their role in this process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular. Archaeology's role in narrating a national past through Roman

military landscapes has been at heart of its own formation and prominence as discipline nationally (Freeman, 1997). The excavations of the Roman Wall by Henry Pelham, Theodore Momsen, and Francis Haverfield popularized the conception of Romanisation as a positive phenomenon (Hingley, 2000); ‘Romanisation was the process by which the uncivilized Briton (or European) achieved civilization’ (p4) under imperial guidance. Momsen (cited in Mattingly, 1997, p31) argues for a Roman Empire which did not crave world dominion but one that saw itself as a benevolent governor of the earth. This narration of a Roman past rendered this landscape of civilized and barbarian as a metaphor for a notion of the greatness of Britishness abroad in its own colonies. Narrating the Wall as part of a British legacy re-orientated Roman culture towards a synthesis with British Imperial ‘ways of seeing’ the world.

As Daniels (1993) states the process of affirming a national landscape involves the rejection of constituencies of national subjects who are not culturally deemed part of a national citizenry in terms of language, origins, genealogies and territorial roots and routes (Gilroy, 1991; Hall, 1999; Ahmed *et al* 2003; Nash, 2005).

“Since the eighteenth century painters and poets have helped narrate and depict national identity, or have their work commandeered to do so; scholars and professionals have been enlisted too: historians, map makers, geographers, engineers, architects and archaeologists.’ (Daniels, 1993, 5)

Hadrian’s Wall, has engendered scholarship that has celebrated this site as integral to the currency of national landscape. The narration of Hadrian’s Wall has shifted over time and its place in national heritage has been secured through these varied landscape archaeologies (Witcher *et al* 2010). Narrative is therefore an important tool in ‘storying our worlds into shape’ (Daniels and Lorimer, 2009). In this research narrative does not sit benignly in service to the material landscape or artefactual evidence, but actively shapes the encounter, experience, cognition and comprehension of the landscape (Kong, 1999). Narrative is understood and becomes phenomenon through a synergistic binding between representations, narrations, and the embodied practical experience of landscape and is orientated through often national historical framings (Said, 1990).

## **Critical Narratives**



The historical values and chronologies of the Wall have been recorded by Spartian, Bede (Gidley, 1870), Herodian (Echols, 1961) and Camden (1806 [1586]), Skinner (1978 [1801]), Hutton (1802), and Thatcher (1921) these are some of the chroniclers of the Wall. There are continuous contentions over who built the Wall over time: Hutton in 1802 reflects on the contrary historical narratives associated with the building of the Wall, he states ‘Agricola’s name was lost in Hadrian’s, so Severus, being superior to both, nearly eclipses both, and the whole is frequently called Severus’s Wall’ (1802, 27). From being Severus’s Wall, in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century the Wall’s storying resonated with British Imperial ambitions (Bruce, 1996, 2). Contextual to this is the Romanticisation of heritage landscapes, what Darby (2000, 16) has termed ‘cultural co modification of landscape’. It is in this period that the Hadrian’s Wall Pilgrimage was begun in 1848 by John Collingwood Bruce. Recounting his journey to fellows at the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries, his descriptions of the magnificence of the Wall was met with doubt. Bruce proposed a communal journey; so began the social journey that was to become known as the Hadrian’s Wall Pilgrimage. Birley termed it ‘a sociable gossiping affair’ (1961, 26), rather than to suggest a sacred journey. Bruce’s speech at the beginning of the second is an example of the role of this frontier landscape to evoke a sense of greatness through proximity to the achievements of the Roman Empire:

‘The Roman Empire was an Empire of strength. As they [the pilgrims] run along the Wall they will learn, not only somewhat of the character of mind of that people, but they will be stimulated to follow the example of their patience, perseverance, and their indomitable vigor... He could not help feeling that we are the successors of the Romans. (1886, 2).

Both narrative and landscape are constituted through and made meaning of in historical writing. De Certeau (1988) unravels the workings of historical narrative which can assist our readings of the history of the Roman Wall. He attends to process, the inevitable contradictions in historical representations, and the limitations of the writing form or an *écriture* (1988, p86). Narrative for de Certeau is

‘controlled by the practices from which it results; even more it is itself a social practice which establishes a well-determined place for readers by redistributing the space of symbolic references any by pressing a ‘lesson’

upon them; it is didactic and magisterial. . . . It creates these narratives of the past which are equivalent of cemeteries within cities; it exorcises and confesses a presence of death amidst the living.’ (1988, 88)

In the case of Hadrian’s Wall, the contemporary historical narrative has celebrated a particular historical narrative of Emperor Hadrian and a residual Romaness that belies the role of Severus and the nature of the presence of soldiery from across the globe based at the frontier (Breeze and Dobson, 2000). However, the form of historical narrative compounds these exclusions in the landscape encounter at the frontier; the visitor experience is about being in the footsteps of Hadrian; see the advertisement below (The Guardian, 2008).

INSERT Plate One: Get Closer to Rome. Head North.

INSERT Plate Two: The British Museum flyer for: Hadrian: Empire and Conflict. Life, Love, Legacy. 2008

The representations of Hadrian above use a particular aesthetic; through the lighting and colour used, the Emperor is encountered as a positive being of greatness, with timeless power. Breeze (2006, 3), argues that ‘Hadrian’s Wall was built on the orders of Emperor Hadrian, who visited Britain in AD 122. His biographer states it was to separate the Romans and the Barbarians. It certainly did that. . . . from about 160 for 250 years it remained the north-west frontier of the Roman empire’. This empire stretched 1 500 miles south to the Sahara desert and east to modern day Iraq. The Wall or international *limes* was a politically built artificial frontier, to assert sovereignty, rule and governance, and to prevent breach from those ‘others’ who were not part of the ‘civilized’ citizenship of Rome. The whiteness of the marble compounds the narrative of Hadrian as closer to the culture of civilized Englishness as recognizable now.

Narrative is a helpful in my postcolonial critical account of the landscape history of the Roman Wall, in that it allows and enables a plural account in historical representation. Within archaeology authors such as Gosden (2004; 2006), Hingley (2000) use a postcolonial critique. Mattingly (1994) in particular is useful here as he approaches Roman Africa and produces a substantial thesis, based on empirical detail. The narrative form is of course one which enables oppositions which can be encountered, yet remain compatible. In *An Archaeology of Race* the landscape history of the Roman Wall is extended to think through the frontier as a whole. The

histories of which are interwoven. The frontier and the Wall are separate but are co-narrated to enable a geo-political postcolonial narration that signifies the race-geographies of the frontier, and narrated with responsibility (Raghuram *et al* 2009). This counters the means through which the heritage narratives of this site have been collapsed into a singular notion of Hadrian's military landscape in the regions heritage narratives. The exhibition narrates the frontier as a lived landscape (with exhibition panels on food, drink, clothing, and African building techniques), using archaeological evidence to situate a postcolonial translation. The research by archaeologists on life, culture and identity have been privileged (Allason-Jones 2001; 2005; Huntley and Stallibrass 1995; Swan and Monaghan 1993; Croom 2007) alongside political critiques of archaeology as a colonial discipline itself (Gosden 2004; Hingley 2000) with prejudiced orientations (Isaac 2004; Martin Bernal, 1987; Orser 2001). The aim here is not a simple erasure of all other established narrations of this landscape, but a tactical re-narration informed by antiquarian and archaeological scholarship.

'Contraries are therefore compatible within the same text under the condition that is *narrative*... narrative preserves the possibility of a science or a philosophy (it is heuristic); but, as such, it occupies their place and hides their absence (de Certeau, 1988,89).

### **Postcolonial Landscape Narratives**

Non-linear narratives are a critical tool for postcolonial theorists who have challenged definitions of themselves and the problematic of using the language of the colonizer, since the 1980s, to re-tell the world, through their voices, texts and reformulations of narrative (Ashcroft *et al* 1989; Said, 1990; Loomba, 1998; Gandhi, 1998). Scholars who seek to challenge neat colonial histories, knowledges, taxonomical framings and appropriations of cultural and material production, have done so through the challenging of the linear form of narrative (Spivak, 1988). This has been both a tool to disrupt a sense of the neatness and singularity of language through acknowledging *difference* and reclaiming the power to narrate histories, cultures and shape new formations within a post-colonial world. For some there is a rupture with pre-colonial self expression,

and for others there is imposed a gap between the use of 'English' and the pre-colonial language (Ashcroft *et al*, 1989, 10). Postcolonial literatures thus employ strategies to 'subvert the imperial cultural formations' (p11).

The re-presencing of black figures in national history whether through text, artifact or image, is important in postcolonial approaches to cultural studies, theory and history-writing. Harris (2009), on considering the institution of British cultural studies itself argues 'that the excision of black and brown Britons as social actors is not a matter of blame relating to individuals, but part of a deeply ingrained tradition of considering British culture while ignoring the presence of black and brown people' (Harris, 2009, p485).

In the *Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft *et al*, 1989), the authors argue how the oppressive act of being defined as 'other' to the 'occidental' and inferior to the colonial subject, was executed using the tool of language and texts. Therefore, the battleground for recovering histories, cultures and subjectivities is the site of the text itself; in form and language. '(t)he texts relationship with the historical subject is an *active* one. It is the text which transforms the historical subtext which it draws up into itself and this transformation constitutes what Jameson characterizes as the 'symbolic act' of the narrative. So the text paradoxically, 'brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction' (Jameson, 1981, 81-2; quoted in Ashcroft *et al*, 1989, 172). In the arena of writing race-histories and geographies the value of narrative is manifold. For Toni Morrison writing is 'a kind of literary archaeology' (Morrison, 1990, 302). Morrison's work has a political ambition. Her project is to counter contemporary values of black history by acknowledging the role of scientific racism in editing the historical narratives that had gone before. 'David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, to mention only a few, had documented their conclusions that blacks were incapable of intelligence. . . . Hegel in 1813 had said that Africans had no 'history' and couldn't write in modern languages (305). Morrison also reflects on how Kant disregarded a perceptive observation by a black man by saying, '(T)he fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid'(Kant,1991,113). In archaeological terms, although we cannot recover what foundational evidence of black history, we can re-narrate the absences, occlusions and rupture the uneven accounts of African history, subjectivity and capacities to be valuable within archaeological scholarship and landscape histories.

Challenges to the embedded and accepted hierarchies of occident and orient have been recently interrogated in Shanks and Tilley's (1987) account of archaeology; 'however poor its data, archaeology provides unique access to the past as 'Other' as a means of holding in tension the universalism of the present' (cited in Rowlands and Kristiansen 1998, p2). Also Gosden (2004; 2006) outlines how British Imperial prejudices based on racial taxonomies have been woven into archaeological scholarship, as a result, he seeks to disrupt their pervasiveness through a fundamental account of material culture. However in undertaking this non-textual intervention, it must be remembered that the archive is always partial; material cultures have been destroyed and occluded from the museum space and national history as a result of imperial undervaluing of 'other' cultures. Material culture has been at the interface of the violences of Imperial narratives and regimes of truth. Absences thus serve to compound historical mythologies and mistruths.

In the case of the Roman Wall the aim here is to use the postcolonial reading of landscape and historical narrative to privilege the race-geographies that are materially evidenced at the sites and in the scholarly accounts. What is important is the ways in which certain peoples and territories are exiled as 'other' within academic thought, influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century notions of taxonomy (R.J.C.Young 2007; Winlow, 2001, 2009; Anderson, 2007). This for example, is evidenced namely in the cultural identity proffered to those civilizations resident in the African continent. Rowlands and Kristiansen (1998) highlight the disciplinary assumptions that shaped figurations of other cultures and the emergence of 'Africa' conceptually, they argue that, '(F)or more than thirty years historians and archaeologists have worked to counteract primitivist ideas about the absence of change, cultural backwardness and technical failure of Africa.' and address the resulting challenge to the Hegelian view of Africa as not being 'an historical continent' (Rowlands and Kristiansen, 1998, p361). These regimes of truth negated, denuded and misrepresented 'others' in archaeological and historical accounts. The exhibition addresses the ways in which this over-arching dominant view also conferred a loss of status and visibility to Severus. Birley's profiling of *The African Emperor* (2008 [1988]) has not been popularized in heritage representations.

In earlier accounts of Severus' rule, these occlusions exist. Collingwood-Bruce (1996) argues that repair began of the damage done to forts throughout the North and to the Wall, where work was in progress in A.D. 205-208. The work was so extensive that Severus came to be described as the actual builder of the Wall, 'and the reputation is deserved to this extent, that in many places his engineers did in fact reconstruct it from the very foundations. The punitive campaign was delayed until 208. . . (I)n 209. . .he advanced against the Caledonians. The campaigns lasted three seasons, with more success than historians admit... Accounts of these Caledonian wars are written to give an impression of failure, but it seems that their main objective was achieved.' (Collingwood-Bruce, 1996, 5).

The effect of the occluded account of Severus' role in the national history, and the landscape itself is to smooth a notion of a cultural history of Britain where Romaness folds into an Englishness and a sense of a nation built on a particular link to 'Europeanness' in terms of bodies, practices, moral landscape.

Bruce highlights the ways in which there has been a 'smoothing' of narration to render Septimius as a lesser actor in the creation of the Wall as we see it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the physical presence we celebrate as the northern frontier in representation, narration and encounter is material evidence of Septimius' determination to consolidate the breaches from the barbarians. In Britannia under the Roman Empire, mobility from across the southern and eastern empire occurred and Roman citizenship was a synthesis between cross cultural flows and the values of the system of governance (Rowlands and Kristiansen, 1998). The Empire as we know, was not a homogeneous society, in fact scholars have argued that the strength of Romaness and its ability to expand rests with its tolerance of 'other' cultures and its ability to civilize and urbanise these cultures in synthesis. The re-presencing of a black history of Roman Britain through the panels highlighting Septimius Severus, Barates, and Saturninus as well as the mobilities of personnel, technologies and other artefactual evidence is at the core of a postcolonial conceptualization of the northern frontier as exhibited in *An Archaeology of Race*. Also recognition of the fact that Hadrian's Wall is a small section of an international borderscape, enables the exhibition to include the *Limes Germanicus* (Rhine to the Danube), *Limes Tripolitanus* (South Libya to Tunisia) and *Limes Arabicus* (running 1 500 km, from Syria to Palestine), all of which are

protected by UNESCO as a *world limes*. This account, disrupts the seemingly ‘national’ grammars of the Wall through taking, an inclusive approach to an internationalist account of Roman archaeology and landscape research.

<INSERT MAP OF INTERNATIONAL LIMES>

## REPRESENTATION

To do justice to both archaeology and postcolonial theory in the curating of the exhibition, it was important to think what a postcolonial archaeology of Hadrian’s Wall would look like. Much of the work of postcolonial theorists has been to address the effect of colonial representations and discourses (Said 1990; Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1988). Using the narration of an exhibition to counter the shaping of this landscape’s story in a colonial narration was one way in which both the grammars of the dominant narration and the ‘ordering’ of the museum space itself could be disrupted (Crang, 1994). One of the few accounts of where archaeology engages with postcolonial theory is where Gosden (2004) argues that postcolonial theory is absolutely relevant to challenge the ‘pernicious influence’ (2004, 20) of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism on the discipline.

As Crang (1994) has affirmed ‘the universalism that museums claim masks power relations’ and as such their narratives have often given coherence and meaning to their contents through a discourse of linear and ‘known’ narrative structure. In this sense *An Archaeology of Race* disrupts on several levels; firstly by offering a re-narration through a postcolonial account; secondly the very fact of being an installation by a non-museum actor it effectively offers different grammars and discourses which themselves shift the usual technologies of knowledge in the museum space; and finally the exhibition espouses an interpretation by adding a biographical narrative of a landscape dominated by African Emperor Septimius Severus and the objects employed in its telling. The narrative structure in this context is not an innocent tool (p39, Crang 1994), but a strategic narrative. In the exhibition the new narrative as owned by the curators and contributors takes up the powerful role of making a *differentiation* between this narrative and others that have gone before in Roman studies. As de Certeau states, this creation of a *differentiated* narrative ‘presupposes the rupture that changes a

tradition into a past object' (p45). This at once makes narrative empowering for the postcolonial strategy, and also enables the contrariness of this new narration to sit comfortably alongside others.

*An Archaeology of Race* embraces the complexities of postcolonial narration in practice. The exhibition is not a simple narration of the subaltern story; Severus and his landscape is one where he is a violent Imperialist oppressor. Any postcolonial reading of this landscape can only make sense in light of British Imperialism and its own drive to develop a narrative that underplays him and his rebuilding this lasting material monument that makes legible the frontier landscape today. Situating the subaltern (in this case both a subaltern lens and figure of black history-making and presence in the British landscape), is not enough. Instead of being only reliant on the rupture of colonial discourses and produced hierarchies (whether they are based on race, culture and/or material culture) 'we must also think about the crucial relations *between* these hierarchies, between forces and discourses' (Loomba, 1998, p200). These fissures between colonial effects and postcolonial scholarship remain in the postcolonial oeuvre. However it is important to reflect on how we may continue to reflect on these foreshadowed tensions that are present in contemporary re-narrations and disruptions. This reflection should not be a debilitating course, instead the legitimacy of institutions (museums, galleries, disciplinary scholarship) underpinned by colonial ideologies cannot be taken for granted, instead there must be moves to critique *and* more importantly strive for a cultural sphere that is colour-blind and not determined by colonial regimes of truth, values, discourses and narrations (Rasheed Araeen, 2000, p18, A new Beginning, Third Text).

### **Postcolonial narration in practice: Severus**

In Hall's (1997) account of challenging a regime of representation is to contest these by reversing stereotypes. One aspect of the exhibition *An Archaeology of Race* is to present a figure that is normally discordant with our notions of rulers, kings, Emperors and colonizers: this account of the frontier landscape places a Black man centre stage in a discourse of Rome, and English landscape, simultaneously. There remains however a continued problematic of self-determination versus a political imperative; race and historical context are complex in this narrative of Hadrian's Wall. For Severus did not consider himself 'black' other or indeed



marginal. He like others of his elite society held a deep rooted belief that blackness was linked with death and the underworld (Snowden 1983, 92). Severus himself after successfully defending against incursions in the North West of Britain, saw an 'Ethiopian' soldier, the presence of a black or *Aethiope* enraged Severus, it is reported that he ordered that the Ethiopian be removed (p179, Snowden, 1970).

One element of the neo-conservative challenge to the premise of the exhibition was posited by both a member of *English Heritage* and a scholar of the Roman Wall, which was 'how do you know he was a Negroid?' There are several layers to this question that expose the complexities of race in Britain today; the conservatism of archaeological scholarship on race-categories and of course of the pervasive racism that hides behind calls for legitimacy, evidence, and a lack of recognition of the influence of racism on scholarship itself. One element of this layering is that my use of the word 'black' intended to mean politically 'other' and usually misrepresented in history, was on this occasion translated as 'negroid'. This response evidences a lack of awareness and engagement with critical race theory, where race is not a biological essential; it is a cultural categorization (Hall 1990; Gilroy 1993; Young 2007). Even in the contemporary era of scientific reemergence of biologism (Gilroy, 2000), scientists struggle to separate social and biological determinants (Fullwiley, 2008). A second layering is the assumption of a colour-blind archaeology; an assumed unrevised account of evidence, truth and knowledge, untouched by cultural, or political and social contexts. This account is of course flawed. As Moralee's (2008) and others' scholarship has highlighted, far from being a singularly colour-blind society, Rome and historical writings on Rome have used racial terms to highlight race difference. When reflecting on Herodian's *Historiae Augustae* (Magie, 1922), Moralee argues that Emperor Maximus Thrax (235-28 CE) is similarly positioned as a perpetrator of the subversion of Senate's authority by being a 'half-barbarian from the periphery of empire' (2008, 55). Terminology such as 'Punic', 'barbarian' has been upheld as evidence of the language of differentiation between the *Roman* ideal and the 'other' savage, uncivilized. These referents become indexical with what is counted as Roman; a metonymical index of Rome's status itself (Isaac, 2004 and Moralee, 2008, 535). Moralee also gives evidence of Herodian views of Roman fears of loss of racial purity in the form of a letter advising against racial contamination, that is fabricated by Herodian to lead us to conclude that 'only a bad emperor would have considered such

transgression' and that Maximus's integral cruelty was a result of his consciousness of racial inferiority (p59-61; Moralee, 2008): 'Just as becoming emperor failed to erase that 'barbarian element' in his father, education failed to erase the racial stain on the son' (2008,63). The historical context of the various authors' accounts of Thrax as barbarian are laid out by Moralee evidencing fears of this profile in the later narratives of 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> century including being linked to the political thesis in Nazi Germany of racial purity (2008,76).

In Birley's (2008 [1988]) account Severus, is described as 'Punic' often referring to him as being of Phoenician decent, from ancient Carthage. These peoples and their cultures were considered predecessors of modern day Berbers, and their language was closely related to Hebrew (Birley, 2008 [1988], 2). Severus's 'hometown' where he spent the first seventeen years of his life, was a very exceptional place, and the 'three cities' markedly different from the rest of what the Romans call 'Africa'. . . . (p1). Tripolitania the region was a hybrid between the Mediterranean and the Sahara. The ethnicity of Severus is of consequence in contemporary times (Spielvogel, 2003; 2006). In contemporary society the idea of an 'African' head of state in Britain is seemingly only possible in theory. However in 193 AD Severus was proclaimed Emperor of Rome and its Imperial territories. Severus was born in Lepcis Magna, which is modern day Libya; he died in York in 211 AD. In 208 AD Severus arrived in Britain, largely to militarily consolidate the difficult frontiers of the northern territory. Under Severus, 'Britannia' was also split into two: Britannia Superior and Inferior, to secure his power. Incursions from 'savage' lands at the edges of Roman rule were constant; also another now World Heritage Site, the Antonine Wall, is a modern day remnant of Rome's early ambitions to conquer the known world. Severus's military cruelty earned him the nickname 'Punic Sulla', referring to his African origin and his vengefulness. Other historical texts reference his 'Punic' roots, 'swarthy complexion' and proclaim him 'The African Emperor'. Throughout history Severus's identity has been a point of commentary, despite movement from around the Empire not being unusual. Roman rule witnessed several units of soldiery which originated from all over the Roman Empire, including North Africa, Eastern Europe, and the lands surrounding the Mediterranean who were stationed across the Empire. In Britain, these populations lived and contributed to 'native' life on the frontier of Hadrian's Wall and beyond, leaving material cultures that they inspired including coins, African cooking pottery, seeds, fabrics, gravestones, inscriptions and texts.

There are complexities to Severus's status and situation as is always highlighted when using an ideological frame such as a postcolonial lens. Although Severus's birth and ethnicity give him a special place in modern history that has had occlusions and exclusions, it remains that he was an elite member of Roman society and a perpetrator of Imperial colonization and violence. In this story however are traces of how ethnicity, birthplace and cultural proximity to a *Latin* profile was paramount. Despite the seeming 'colour-blind' nature of the empire, Severus and others of his society worked hard to *become* Roman. One early aid to his success was the status of Lepcis itself. In 78 Lepcis had become a *municipium* a chartered town with the 'Latin right'; formal recognition of the *Latin* nature of this 'formerly alien community', *civitas peregrina*. In particular, the new status automatically conferred full Roman citizenship on those annually elected as magistrates.' (Birley 2008,16). This shift in status followed with people changing their names from Punic to Latin, and the recession in the use of Punic language and inscription (Birley, 2008, 17). At the same time as having political capital and access to Rome, the Septimii had lands near Rome, and Severus himself was 'educated with the sons of the great' He completed his education by studying with 'the great Quintilian, first holder of an imperially endowed chair of rhetoric.' (Birley, 2008, 18). Throughout his time however the description 'Punic' was a derogatory mode bolstered by the memory of the Hannibalic war. Around 100 AD Lepcis was granted the rank of *colonia* and all its inhabitants became Roman citizens, conjoined with the cultural citizenship and governance of Rome. The contextualization of Severus's identity, in history suffers a 'treatment' based on the historical context in which he is written about, and the dominant ideologies of that period. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important to highlight to residents of the frontier in Carlisle, Cumbria, Newcastle and Durham the multi-ethnic roots and cultures of both Emperor and personnel on the frontier, as contemporary memory-history in the region has little public recognition of it. These issues are outlined in the exhibition panels entitled: *Septimius Severus, Roman Citizenship* and *Severus versus Obama*.

The positioning of race within Roman scholarship reflects much of the contextual social politics of the day within which records are made, and thus scholars such as Isaac (2004) are keen to encourage us to situate scholarship on difference. Moralee (2008) argues that racial profile of Severus and others shifts in the 6<sup>th</sup> century as 'barbarians' become legitimate players in the Western Empire. In 19<sup>th</sup> century, hybridity in its

colonial sense came to be of primary concern in terms of being a threat to humanity and civilization themselves. Using these critiques Moralee states that 'No longer is Romanisation seen as a steam roller, flattening locals into toga-clad mandarins', instead of being a racial category, 'hybrid' is the location and site of cultural intersections at the edges of where the colonizer flows into new territories. The cultures at the edges are thus creative, empowered and productive for the Imperial mission, as they enable a move away from notions of Roman and Barbarian *per se*.

### **The frontier as a multicultural landscape**

The centerpiece of the exhibition, is a lenticular image (a filmed version of the bust at the BM's front entrance, made by *Spatial Imaging*) of the African Emperor, who like all others before him is pictured in white marble. The discordancy between 'white' marble and African Roman is at play here. The centrality of the bust in the room is a statement about the monument of the Wall and landscape as a legacy of his rebuilding it in the form we see it today. Draping each side of Severus are two lengths of bright patterned cloth, 5 meters long and 2 meters in width, each from Syria and Egypt respectively which would normally be found in the Imperial household (Croom, 2007). The aim here is to disrupt the usual grammars of the Romans as usually encountered at the museum; the colours and textures of the fabric, which are hung against a purple Wall space, are intended to draw you into a new narration. An exclusive 'English' sense of heritage landscape is unsettled.

The role that Hadrian's Wall played in the securitization of the frontier extended well beyond that of Britannia. The northern frontier marked the Roman Empire through Europe, Asia, Arabia and Africa. This community of borders connected up societies from the whole Empire. It was a site of mobility and of residence auxiliary soldiers recruited from all over the world. As the map below shows the geographical places of 'origin' of soldiery was extensive; thus auxiliary units often took the name of the ethnic community from which the soldiers were originally recruited. They were usually posted to provinces far from their homes. These included modern day states including: Switzerland, Romania, Macedonia, Germany, Eastern Europe,

Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Syria, Morocco, France, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and many others. In time these units kept their 'ethnic' names but did also later recruit local personnel in Britain (Mann, 1983).

In Thatcher's 1921, account of his walk along the Roman Wall, it is clear that he imagines the cultural legacy of the Roman occupation. Thatcher describes the continual intertwining of the English with an international community of soldiery from other countries and on the continual depletion of British natives employed to secure the limes elsewhere.

'As vacancies occurred they were supplied by drafts from different countries furnishing men to the particular garrison, while discharged veterans were not sent back to their native country, but were settled and provided for in colonies in Britain of their own countrymen. . . . all the rank and file came from some conquered country or other on the continent, none of them were British . . . the Roman policy seems to have been to recruit the army from the natives of conquered countries, but always to draft them into some legion stationed far away from their own country . . . the Wall was garrisoned by men taken from almost every land known to the civilized world except Britain itself' (Thatcher, 1921, 12)

Many of the chroniclers traversing the Wall make comparisons between Roman and British Imperial values and achievements. The reverend John Skinner (1978 [1801]) is one who questions the humanity of the Romans toward their colonies. . . 'How curious is the term Barbarians, bestowed on all who were not Roman. In our Indian regiments, we soften the term by calling the officers of our auxiliary, native cavalymen or infantry' (1978, 41).

A full account of the origins and stationing of soldiery from overseas at the Wall is outlined in the *Notitia Dignitatum*; it is the best record of stationed garrison at the Wall prior to 420. This panel below is an original production for *An Archaeology of Race* which is based on the *Notitia Dignitatum* and evidences the presence of Iraqi's, Syrians, North Africans and many others that were the first legions of migrants that were populating the frontier. Early evidence has been found of garrisons from all over the Empire stationed at Hadrian's Wall and of their influence and exchanges with local populations (Colingwood-Bruce 1875, xiv). Roman society, in

Britain can be argued to have been formed from a number of diasporas from across the Empire, whose presence translated the nature, landscape and cultural practices in Britain (Eckardt, 2009).

>INSERT MOBILITIES PLATE<

Included in the exhibition are several panels, not able to be discussed here, showing the scale of mobilities of foods, fauna and flora, technologies and cultural praxes that are transferred to Britain in the form of an *ecological* and *cultural portmanteau* (Tolia-Kelly, 2004a; b; c). Roth (2003) has argued that the greatest insight into the transfer of cultural in the vernacular modes of society is to consider identity and power, in the material cultures and through these the *habitus* of the producer and consumer are made co-present. The exhibition itself aims to reflect a notion of *bricolage* in Roth's terms, where imbued in the aesthetics, content and grammars of the space are made to speak about social geographies and relations in Roman Britain that may have not been made present prior (Roth, 2003,44). However, in any postcolonial account of ethnicities it is important not just to focus on food, fabric and cultures. Intellectual and technological exchanges are also present on the frontier landscape and are incorporated in the exhibition. Cooking technologies such as North African pottery braziers are found regularly on the Wall. These have been reconstructed in the exhibition alongside the pottery equipment of Ancient Britons. It is clear that native potters learned to produce African designed pottery braziers for the local market, these had built in space for burning wood under the casserole which sat above. In the same way as contemporary cooking utensils are 'nativised' from 'foreign' sources such as Woks and coffee machines, in Roman times these braziers were likely to be absorbed into the local culture but given their fragility, no clear evidence remains. African vaulting tubes too are found in construction of structures along the Wall, which show the engineering exchanges across the Empire; Africa as a continent was a source of innovation and design in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century, which in turn shaped this landscape.

## Conclusions

Academics have a responsibility towards public engagement and dialogue. *An Archaeology of Race* brings to the public realm a set of artefacts that ground a theoretical perspective on the Roman frontier and link it to both contemporary and historical issues of citizenship, race, imperialism and culture. The aesthetics, grammars and

texts embedded in the exhibition are formulations of a postcolonial interpretation of a national heritage landscape. It incorporates a non-nationalistic orientation (Beck and Sznajder, 2006) and a transparent knowledge production process of narrative writing (Noxolo, 2009). The archival records and artefacts show that Roman culture was not homogeneous, and that there has been a tendency to present a binary between Romans, aiming to civilise an uncomplicated 'native' population. These binaries have tended to skew universalist interpretations of the past (Fitzjohn, 2007). What *An Archaeology of Race* has sought to do is to enrich material accounts of the relations between 'native' and 'Roman' as well as reconsider the geographies of mobilities of peoples, technologies, goods and cultures. A postcolonial interpretation of Hadrian's Wall enables us to see a dynamic, multi-cultured society, and thus challenges a seemingly benign white Imperial Romaness; 'In the case of York, the Roman population may have had more diverse origins than the city has now' (Eckhardt, 2010). The exhibition rejects a narration of Roman Britain based purely on a Victorian sensibility about an Imperial Englishness that aspires to an Augustinian/Hadrianic Roman picture rather than a Severan one. Severus is brought forward here to celebrate Black presence. However 'Severus' does not stand as benevolent Emperor, but as a violent Imperialist, and is compared to President Obama's own positioning. The exhibition also enables the archaeological and classicist critique of a 'colour-blind' Roman citizenship. Moralee (2008) and Isaac (2004) inform a new location from which to think about the interpretation of the material cultures and Sherwin-Smith (1967) critiques the narrations of historians such as Strabo, Pliny and Tacitus who use freely caricatures of 'barbarians'; stereotyped in terms of physique, culture and capability. These scholars have informed my approach on Roman mobility and identity (Dobson and Mann 1973; Gardner, 2007).

The exhibition has attended to a revitalization of a postcolonial perspective on the archaeological frontier and artefactual remains of culture, included are evidences of 'syncretism' in the day-to-day (Webster, 1997). These are sites, practices and cultures remain as precipitates of memory, heritage and alternative archaeologies and landscapes of cultural identity and fluid materialities of embodied, spiritual and biological exchanges and creativities in the everyday, public life of Roman Britain.

## IMAGES:

Plate One: INSERT PLATE ONE: Get Closer to Rome. Head North.

Plate Two: The British Museum flyer for: Hadrian: Empire and Conflict. Life, Love, Legacy. 2008

Plate Three: Mobilities Map

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