Sociopathic abscess or yawning chasm? The absent postcolonial transition in

Doctor Who

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Abstract

This paper explores discourses of colonialism, cosmopolitanism and postcolonialism in the long-running television series, *Doctor Who*. *Doctor Who* has frequently explored past colonial scenarios and has depicted cosmopolitan futures as multiracial and queer-positive, constructing a teleological model of human history. Yet postcolonial transition stages between the overthrow of colonialism and the instatement of cosmopolitan polities have received little attention within the program. This apparent ‘yawning chasm’ — this inability to acknowledge the material realities of an inequitable postcolonial world shaped by exploitative trade practices, diasporic trauma and racist discrimination — is whitewashed by the representation of past, present and future humanity as unchangingly diverse; literally fixed in happy demographic variety. Harmonious cosmopolitanism is thus presented as a non-negotiable fact of human inevitability, casting instances of racist oppression as unnatural blips. Under this construction, the postcolonial transition needs no explication, because to throw off colonialism’s chains is merely to revert to a more natural state of humanness, that is, cosmopolitanism. Only a few *Doctor Who* stories break with this model to deal with the ‘sociopathic abscess’ that is real life postcolonial modernity.

Key Words

Doctor Who, cosmopolitanism, colonialism, postcolonialism, race, teleology, science fiction

1. Introduction

Zargo: In any society there is bound to be a division. The rulers and the ruled.

The Doctor: A division? Yawning chasm, I'd say. Wouldn't you?

Romana: No, I'd say a sociopathic abscess.

The Doctor: Oh, I wish I'd thought of that. That's a good diagnosis. Yes, I've never seen such a state of decay.

-- *Doctor Who, State of Decay* (1980)

Themes of colonialism and cosmopolitanism make frequent appearances in the science fiction television series, *Doctor Who*. While colonialism stories reference the 20th century past, they are almost always explored through the allegorical device of future human colonies on alien planets. On the other hand, a multiracial cosmopolitanism is represented literally, as a glimpse of what the present world looks like or as the future destination of humanity. Together, these elements of *Doctor Who* tell a teleological tale of human history, beginning with colonialism, proceeding with the overthrow of colonial regimes, and ending up with cosmopolitanism. But there is a glaring omission in this tale: depictions of what happens *after* a colonialist enterprise is overthrown, but *before* a cosmopolitan society of harmonious diversity is established. Inequitable and oppressive postcolonial realities that infest the real world of the present day — exploitative trade practices, biopiracy and resource theft, chronic global diseases with insufficient resources for treatment, diasporic trauma, and racist discrimination to name a few — receive scant attention in *Doctor Who*.

Writer Terrance Dicks' script for the *Doctor Who* serial *State of Decay*, quoted above, offers two metaphors for structural oppression — *the yawning chasm* and *the sociopathic abscess* — which are useful for characterising this glaring omission. In a world whose dominant belief systems subscribe to cosmopolitan ideals that have not materialised, postcolonial realities are well characterized as a sociopathic abscess. *Doctor Who*'s virtual omission of this festering blight then seems a yawning chasm in

its telling of the teleological tale. This paper examines the philosophical and political commitments of *Doctor Who* that make sense of this observation and touches on its significance in terms of real world politics of race.

Doctor Who is the longest running science fiction television series in the world.ⁱ Produced in the UK by the BBC, the original series of the program ran almost continuously in 26 seasons between 1963 and 1989.ⁱⁱ The program was revived in a new series in 2005, with a season produced each year since then.ⁱⁱⁱ *Doctor Who* is serialized, with each season comprising 1-10 stand-alone serials made up of 1-12 episodes.^{iv} While the original series achieved cult status during the 20th century, the new series rapidly garnered enormous popularity in the 21st, and has won at least 39 awards.^v

The program features a central character called 'The Doctor'. The Doctor is a Time Lord from a scientifically 'advanced' planet and he travels through time and space in a ship called the TARDIS. The Doctor almost always travels with one or more companions who are frequently humans from contemporary Earth. The companions' dramaturgical function is to provide an identification point for viewers.^{vi} The Doctor's body is able to completely regenerate if he is ever killed, and this device has allowed the program to continue for nearly half a century with different actors playing the part, all of who have been white men. *Doctor Who* was originally conceived as a children's semi-educational drama about history and science,^{vii} and in mid-1960s serials the Doctor was portrayed as a scientist adventurer, travelling the universe to study it. But since the late 60s, although he has ostensibly remained a scientist, he has been characterized more as a freedom fighter, using the opportunities presented by his travels to right wrongs.

In the following, I first review *Doctor Who*'s depictions of colonialism and cosmopolitanism and their political implications. I then offer interpretations for the

existence of the yawning chasm where the postcolonial transition should be in the teleological timeline between colonialism's end and cosmopolitanism's beginning. I take as a given that the imposition of a Western linear model of history on colonial subjects — particularly stagist teleology — is problematic because of its fundamentalist Eurocentrism and its employment as a tool of oppressive governmentality.^{viii} My aim is not to reinforce this model by demanding that the timeline from past to future be completed. Rather, I seek to draw attention to its inadequacy by identifying the reason for the gap in *Doctor Who*'s timeline: the program's underlying commitment to an essentialist view of humanity. Despite the teleological model's (racist and deterministic) pretensions to human developmentalism, it is utterly ahistorical, and cannot cope with the possibility of historicism that postcolonial challenges introduce. I finish by discussing *Doctor Who*'s limited but significant representations of the postcolonial sociopathic abscess — the diverse but specific material uncertainties and horrors of contemporary existence that are attributable in some way to colonialism and its fallout and have no easy remedy — to highlight the necessity of finding new, non-teleological models, including new ways of conceiving of postcolonialism itself.^{ix}

2. Colonialism and Cosmopolitanism in *Doctor Who*

Colonialism

As Alec Charles notes in his critique of *Doctor Who*'s representations of colonialism and anti-colonialism, scores of peoples and nations achieved independence from Britain during the 1940s, 50s and 60s.^x With its genesis in 1963, it may come as no surprise that *Doctor Who* has dealt with anti-colonialist themes reasonably frequently throughout its history, starting in its first season and continuing in the new series. A handful of serials reference the role of English scientist-explorers in real world colonial

enterprises, for example in Egypt (*Pyramids of Mars* (1975)), the Amazon basin (*Black Orchid* (1982)) and central Africa (*Ghost Light* (1989)). In all cases, the colonial projects have dire consequences for the colonizers, sending the scientist-explorers mad. But few of these serials are *about* colonialism as such, rather focusing on other issues, and consequently their attitude to colonialism is somewhat ambiguous.

There are a number of serials that explore colonial scenarios in depth though. The most obvious engagement with these themes is in six serials featuring colonial situations in crisis: *The Sensorites* (1964), *The Space Museum* (1965), *The Mutants* (1972), *The Power of Kroll* (1978), *Kinda* (1982) and *Planet of the Ood* (2008). Two of these take place at the moment where colonialism threatens (*The Sensorites*, *Kinda*) and are resolved with human (or human-like) proto-colonizers quietly agreeing to leave, never to return. The other four deal with long-standing colonial situations, and are resolved via an indigenous uprising that forces colonizers off the planet. In all six of these stories, colonizer and colonized are shown to be incompatible cohabitants, and the colonized reclaim self-determination.

Two colonialism-themed *Doctor Who* serials conclude differently, with colonizers and colonized reconciling: *The Savages* (1966) and *The Happiness Patrol* (1988). In each case, one or more institutions of oppression (government, justice system, machinery for extracting ‘life force’ from the colonized) are destroyed by the end of the story, toppling an oppressive regime and resolving the problem. In both cases this results from an uprising by exploited peoples. In *The Savages* it is the colonized themselves who revolt, but in *The Happiness Patrol* the revolutionaries are working class members of the colonizer citizenry, and the colonized people (the “Pipe People”) are not the primary focus of the story. The Pipe People’s views on colonization are not clear, although the oppressive regime has caused their near starvation. However, the

denouement to both stories suggests that colonizers and colonized will live together in harmony under a new regime.

Three serials have taken a contrary position to these anti-colonialist tales. *The Aztecs* (1964), *Colony in Space* (1971) and *The Curse of Peladon* (1972) all implicitly justify colonialism on the grounds that the colonized are ‘savages’ in need of ‘civilization’.^{xi} In *The Aztecs*, set just prior to Cortes’s conquest, the Doctor’s historian companion Barbara tries to save the people from their “barbarous” selves by preventing the practice of human sacrifices. She does this in the belief that by cultivating the “civilized” side of Aztec culture, she can alter the Conquistadors’ negative perception of the Aztecs and thus prevent the conquest from ever occurring. Barbara gives up when the Aztecs fail to rise to her challenge, surrendering to the inevitability of the fate that the Aztecs appear to bring on themselves. Similarly, *The Curse of Peladon* concerns a ‘medieval’ world governed by religion. Its rational, atheist king fights against the dominance of religious orthodoxy by inviting an interstellar, UN-like Federation to intellectually colonize his planet, in order to raise his people from the “barbarism” of superstition and ignorance. The Federation are only too happy to oblige. *Colony in Space* concerns three parties: a tribe of indigenous “Primitives”, a small community of alternative lifestyle colonizers seeking refuge from an overpopulated Earth, and the Interplanetary Mining Corporation come to plunder the planet of its minerals. The Primitives (as they are called) are the mute, brown- and green-skinned descendants of a once great but foolish civilization which declined under destructive and poisonous technologization; they have lost their science and replaced it with religion. The story is resolved by the self sacrifice of the Primitives at the behest of their voiced, white-skinned leader, who considers his people doomed because of their failure to make enlightened choices years before. The

concurrent bringing to justice of the evil mining corporation leaves the planet conveniently empty for colonization by the Earthlings.

Common to these three types of serials (anti-colonialism, reconciliation, pro-colonialism) is a judgement about the worthiness of the colonized to self-govern. Since in each case colonizers use science and technology to exploit the colonized world, evidence of worthiness often comes in the form of conformity to Western-style ‘scientific enlightenment’.^{xii} Thus, the indigenous Sensorites are shown to be scientifically competent, with their own laboratories and experimental scientists (*The Sensorites*). The colonized Xerons agree to heed the Doctor’s injunction not to “lose sight of science altogether” while they dismantle the science museum that is the masters’ primary tool of oppression (*The Space Museum*). The oppressed “Savages” reveal that they too had “science” before the oppressive “Elders” started sapping their life force (*The Savages*). In *The Mutants*, an off-world anthropologist finds evidence of the indigenous Mutts’ sophisticated scientific knowledge, now lost due to colonization. The indigenous Kinda have necklaces resembling the DNA double helix, and have the ability to engineer complex audio-psychological technology, causing the Doctor to admire them as “very sophisticated people” (*Kinda*). The Peladonians are willing to become scientific instead of superstitious (*The Curse of Peladon*), so Peladon retains a large degree of autonomy even while voluntarily remaining under the intellectual mentorship of the Federation. On the other hand, both the Aztecs and the *Colony in Space* Primitives fail when offered the opportunity to follow a Western rationalist path, instead reverting to superstitious beliefs; thus they prove their unworthiness to even exist let alone self-govern.

This calls to mind the ideological viewpoint commonly known as *terra nullius*, which considers the exploitation of nature to be intrinsic to the state of being human,^{xiii}

and so dismisses the property rights and politics of those people whose nature exploiting activities do not conform to Western standards.^{xiv} Accordingly, the rejection of *terra nullius* has been rhetorically important in legal battles for indigenous land justice.^{xv} By conferring self-determination only on those with the ‘correct’ attitude to rationalist science and technology, *Doctor Who* implicitly justifies *terra nullius*-influenced dispossession.

The Power of Kroll, *The Happiness Patrol* and *Planet of the Ood* are exceptions to this pattern to some extent. None of the colonized races in these serials visibly possess Western-style science and technology, yet their entitlement to self-determination is more or less endorsed by the Doctor, and hence, by the program’s authors. There are caveats to this though. The pipe people in *The Happiness Patrol* remain stuck with the colonizers, so self-determination is less clear for them. The colonized “Swampies” in *The Power of Kroll* reveal that they have *chosen* to inhabit the planet and live their ‘simple’ life — they did not end up there through chance and indigeneity — implying that their non-technologized lifestyle is not a deficit borne of ‘ignorance’ but rather a decision based on ‘enlightened reason’: they are ‘Westerners’ going back to nature.

The Ood, the most recently depicted colonized subjects, may simply be exceptional, but again there are caveats to this diagnosis. The Doctor remarks that the Ood’s planet is near to the Sensorites’ planet and that the two species are likely related, perhaps suggesting that the Ood are closer to rationalist technologization than they appear. The Ood ultimately prove their worthiness to self-govern another way: by offering religious-style tribute to the Doctor and companion Donna. The Doctor and Donna — human-like and human — resemble the colonizers (who are human) and do little but stand in solidarity with the Ood. Yet the Ood all but worship them. The Doctor obnoxiously asks for the privilege of pulling the switch that effects the Ood’s liberation and his wish is

granted, thus depriving the colonized of their own symbolic moment. At the end of the serial, the Doctor and Donna are given a glorious send-off with their very own hymn-like Ood song, and as they climb, Christ-like, into the TARDIS for literal ascension into the heavens, they are told their input will never be forgotten. By directing their religious energy in a rationalist direction, towards the scientifically minded Doctor — and by offering appropriate gratitude towards the benevolent bearers of the white man's burden — the Ood prove themselves worthy too.

Under this 'rationalist civilization' paradigm for judging cultures, the rational gain entrance to humanity; the irrational are swept aside. This model is both deterministic and essentialist, positing an inevitable predestination for humanity in a Western-style cosmopolitan future. The importance of this becomes clearer in the next section.

Cosmopolitanism

The postcolonial migration from former colonies into Europe, North America and Australasia that accompanied and followed independence movements has expanded and consolidated multicultural communities in the West. Multiraciality and to a lesser extent multiethnicity, in combination with heightened consciousness about gender and sexual diversity — in short, cosmopolitanism(s) — have become intrinsic to representations of both contemporary British society and future human societies in the new series of *Doctor Who*. Vaguely cosmopolitan ideas were present in the original series, manifesting as multiracial and/or multiethnic human futures and presents, or as global internationalist scientific collaborations.^{xvi} But they were often tokenistic and were far from standard: unlike the new series, there are many original series depictions of human futures and presents that are unself-consciously monocultural and tediously white. For

this reason, this section draws on cosmopolitan representations in the new series to gauge the program's emerging hypothesis of human history.

The Doctor's six companions^{xvii} in the new series are themselves drawn from a cosmopolitan vision. Almost all are from London in the present; the exception is companion Jack, an openly bisexual white man from Earth's future. The others are white working class Rose who lives on a housing estate and works in a shop, her black boyfriend Mickey from the same estate, Rose's gyro-collecting white mum Jackie, black medical student Martha, and ginger-haired temp Donna. In other words, all the Doctor's companions are black, queer and/or working class. Jack, who features more prominently in the spin-off series *Torchwood*,^{xviii} has been hailed as television's first bisexual male hero.^{xix} Martha was hailed as *Doctor Who*'s first black (and first non-white) companion when she was cast in 2006.^{xx} Questions about the status of Mickey as companion have since thrown that claim into dispute;^{xxi} regardless, Jack, Martha and Mickey all stand in contrast to the original series companions, who were definitely all white and none of whom were openly queer.^{xxii} While working class companions had appeared before, none were unskilled workers nor chronically under- or unemployed like Rose, Donna and Jackie. Non-continuing black, Asian and queer characters have peppered at least 15 stories set in Earth's present, contributing to the representation of 21st century Britain as an unself-consciously diverse and liberal cosmopolis.^{xxiii}

Representations of humanity's future in 14 serials of the new series are multiracial in casting, featuring black and Asian actors, if not multiethnic in characterisation.^{xxiv} At least three of these serials also contain queer characters.^{xxv} But while these cosmopolitan futures embrace diversity, they are not utopian.^{xxvi} Almost all these stories take place within a version of capitalism, in which ethical standards are breached for the sake of wealth and class snobbery is commonplace. Difference must be defended

against the threat of the enemy Cybermen, who wish to make everyone the same by removing “sex and class and colour and creed” (*The Rise of the Cybermen* (2006)). Cyborgs face relationship discrimination in a transparent metaphor for queer struggles (*Voyage of the Damned* (2007)). In other words, these representations of future social diversity do not depict speculative possibilities so much as a version of 21st century urban Western reality, extended into the future and expanded to encompass the whole planet / galaxy / universe.

But in this future, all the peoples of the Earth form a vast monolithic community with no pockets of divergent culture or alternative lifestyles. There are no images of Maasai dancers in the Great Rift Valley, no Pitjantjatjara ceremonies at Uluru. There are no battles for cultural dominance; it seems the West has already won that fight, because the future most closely resembles the West. The world — the universe — is one great cosmopolis in which all comers jostle shoulder to shoulder in the same old crappy jobs, retaining their mohawks or pinstripe, their skin tones and sexual proclivities, their different species, solely as a matter of personal taste and mundane variation. Class snobbery is fought, but class differences are implicitly embraced as part of the rich tapestry of human life. Thus, diversity is a non-negotiable fact in the future as in new *Doctor Who*’s present. But it is a fact that has lost all of its history and deeper political significance, rendering differences trivial rather than loaded.

The new series also represents Earth’s *past* as a place of happy and benign diversity. Depression-era New York contains mixed-race shanty towns led by a black man (*Daleks in Manhattan* (2007)). Black women populate the streets and royal courts of Victorian England and Enlightenment France (*The Next Doctor* (2008), *The Girl in the Fireplace* (2006)). The 1920s, 40s and 50s are populated with gay men (*The Unicorn and the Wasp* (2008), *The Empty Child* (2005), *The Idiot’s Lantern* (2006)). In *The*

Shakespeare Code (2007), set in London in 1599, Martha worries about her safety in an era of slavery, but the Doctor reassures her that the world is actually as colour-blind as he is:

Martha: Oh, but hold on. Am I alright? I'm not going to get carted off as a slave am I?
The Doctor: Why would they do that?
Martha: Not exactly white, in case you hadn't noticed.
The Doctor: I'm not even human. Just walk about like you own the place, works for me. Besides, you'd be surprised.
(Ahead of them, black women walk amongst the crowd, clearly at home and safe.)
The Doctor: Elizabethan England - not so different from your time.
Look over there --
(The Doctor points to someone scooping manure, people talking over a barrel of ale, a street preacher forecasting hellfire and damnation.)
The Doctor: They've got recycling. Water cooler rumour. Global warming . . .
(And soon after, at the Globe Theatre, the Doctor and Martha applaud Shakespearean actors.)
Martha: And those are men dressed as women, yeah?
The Doctor: London never changes.

With this, the past, present and future all begin to look remarkably alike.

This consistency in *what humanity looks like* constructs human diversity as an unremarkable and timeless fact. It casts racist and homophobic attitudes as threatening, but in the grand scheme of human history, anomalous. The urge to a cosmopolitanism of 'many colours one culture' is thus naturalized and essentialized. There are no deep power relations; there is only the eternal humanity, different in colour but united in all other respects. This is no melting pot, it is no salad bowl: the appropriate metaphor comes from *Doctor Who*'s most famous foodstuff: humanity is so many coloured jelly babies united inside a colourless (white) paper bag.

3. Yawning chasm or sociopathic abscess?

The yawning chasm between the colonial and the cosmopolitan

Despite its apparently eager engagement with representations of colonialism and cosmopolitanism, *Doctor Who* has a dearth of material dealing with what comes in between: the messy transition from purgatory to paradise in which indigenous peoples, the diasporic descendents of slaves and refugees, members of migrant communities, and the subaltern descendants of the colonizers must all negotiate new ways of living together in a context of continuing structural inequality and oppression. The sociopathic abscess that is 21st century postcolonial existence is rendered largely invisible in *Doctor Who*, and a yawning chasm of nothing appears in its place.

One of the reasons for this chasm is that there is no straightforward linear temporal relationship between a colonial past, postcolonial present and cosmopolitan future in *Doctor Who*, since most representations of colonialism take place in humanity's future. There are no serials about the independence movements in Africa and the Caribbean to precede Martha and Mickey's diasporic existence in contemporary London, and as we have seen, even Martha's fear of 16th century slavery is dismissed as misplaced. Colonialism is *concurrent* with cosmopolitanism in humanity's future, and so is unconnected to questions of race; the colonizers in *Doctor Who* can be Asian, black or white, because the colonized are always different species. In *The Savages* this is not true — the colonized and colonizers both look like humans and their species status is not clear — but this serial avoids questions of race another way. While it is an obvious metaphor for colonialist exploitation, its original title was *The White Savages*,^{xxvii} and all its characters are white. In this respect there is no difference between an all white solution to colonialism and a multicoloured solution, because the solution is merely an unshackling of all slaves into 'freedom'.

As already noted, the naturalisation of human diversity is another reason for the 'yawning chasm' in *Doctor Who*. In *Utopia* (2007), at the end of the universe, humans

have always reverted “to the same basic shape” (as the Doctor says) with the same basic stink (as Jack notes) and the same basic varieties of racial diversity, as we ourselves see. We are still “the fundamental human” in the Doctor’s words. If this is what is natural then no wonder there is no postcolonial abscess, for to throw off the chains of colonialism is merely to revert to our natural state: essentialized cosmopolitanism. Race is rendered invisible by its abundance. Cosmopolitanism is when we don’t have to think about race anymore. The new series is good at this; it is outstanding at colour-blind, equal opportunity casting, while the original series with a few exceptions failed dismally in this respect.^{xxviii} It is a good thing that the new series has effected an improvement — both for actors and for viewers who want to see characters that look like them and the people they know. There are surely great benefits of such colour-blind role modelling,^{xxix} but by and large, *equal opportunity casting* is the beginning and the end of cosmopolitanism in *Doctor Who*. There are also costs of not talking about race, power and history, and why *Doctor Who* predominantly chooses one approach over the other is the question.

The program’s adherence to a soft liberal humanist moral landscape may provide an answer.^{xxx} Under this political perspective, it makes no sense for there still to be oppression once people are ‘free from slavery’, because recognising and eliminating the mistake of racism ought to be enough. The Doctor’s battle against evil is perpetual precisely because like other liberals, he does not recognize structural oppression that is everywhere around him. On a space station beset by class hierarchies, his battle is to effect freedom of the press (*The Long Game* (2005)): a worthy cause to be sure, but not the only one. The Doctor’s colour-blindness extends to referring to Mickey as “Mickey the idiot”, irrespective of the elitist hierarchies of ‘smart white doctor vs stupid black estate dweller’ he reinforces through this act. Perpetual class oppression ensures ample

material for building drama in the program, but it simultaneously renders all oppression invisible, including itself. Exploiting others for profit is naturalized as the evil that folks do. White cosmopolitanism is the same as multicoloured cosmopolitanism. The evil of slavers is the same as the evil of a cosmic squid invading Earth via shop window dummies (Rose (2005)). As the Doctor says in *The Curse of Fenric* (1989):

Evil, evil since the dawn of time . . . The beginning of all beginnings.
Two forces, only good and evil. Then chaos. Time is born. Matter.
Space. The universe cries out like a newborn. The forces shatter as the
universe explodes outwards. Only echoes remain. And yet somehow,
somehow, the evil force survives. An intelligence: pure evil.

Thus, the postcolonial hurdles faced by Chinese Londoners in the Victorian gothic tale *The Talons of Weng Chiang* (1977) are erased by an orientalist aesthetic that paints them as opium smoking, superstitious, murderous thugs. They are merely bad people, their motivations shrouded in mystery. In *Black Orchid*, the colonialist botanist mutilated by ‘bad Indians’ is nursed to health by a tribe of ‘good Indians’, who even send one of their own back to England to be his carer. Never mind that the botanist defiled and stole a sacred flower from the ‘bad Indians’ for his classificatory empire. In *Warriors’ Gate* (1981), a race of former slave-masters, the Tharils, have themselves now been enslaved by their former slaves, humans. The story ends with companion Romana leaving to help liberate the Tharils. The ideological closure here rests in a liberal humanist framework: it does not deal with consequences, only reverses the table so that again the Doctor and Romana play the role of abolitionist. The humans who fought the Tharils have no voice here — the only humans who speak are slavers. In other words, slaves themselves have no franchise in administering justice; the only correct action is to fight generic ‘evil’ wherever it arises.

Even *Turn Left* (2008), a dystopian depiction of an apocalyptic Britain that closes its borders and incarcerates migrants in internment camps, fails to redeem this situation.

The story rewrites the events of the previous two seasons of *Doctor Who*, showing how they would have transpired had the Doctor died in an early episode. It explicitly links the death of the Doctor to an oppressive xenophobic regime in which everybody suffers: while migrants are locked up, 'native' Britons become internally displaced people; it is a glaring and unpleasant contrast to the usual cosmopolitan futures seen in the program. At the end, we return with relief to 'real life' when the Doctor's death is prevented after all, and the ordinary paradise of the harmoniously diverse present never looked so good. Although it seems promising, like *Planet of the Ood* this story requires the (white, male, Cockney-accented but by birthright ruling class, ostensibly queer but behaviourally heterosexual, alien but by allegiance human) Doctor to save the day, again raising serious political problems with this white man's burden scenario. It seems that the fate of the universe only rests upon the fate of the Doctor. A deep recognition of the material circumstances of racism is noticeably absent.

But this tells us what the Doctor (and thus, *Doctor Who*) stands for. The Doctor is the symbolic cosmopolitan. His opposition to racism manifests as colour-blindness. He is a hero of liberal individualism from the school of being nice to each other. In travelling from one end of space and time to the other righting wrongs, he paradoxically becomes a fixed certainty, symbolising only Good.^{xxx} He possesses near-omniscience and -omnipotence that scientists and imperialists can only aspire to, but like them his tools are Western science and Western morality. Though ostensibly anti-establishment,^{xxxii} this all-encompassing vision makes his cosmopolis equivalent to empire.^{xxxiii} His job is to perpetually fight the evil that threatens this status quo.

If this is the case, there is no postcolonial sociopathic abscess because the specific circumstances of evil are supremely irrelevant. Migrant internment is just another problem to be solved. Colonialism is a manifestation of evil but only because bad

people did bad things to others. If there are problems after colonization ends, it is because there are still bad people, as there will always be. Slavery was just ignorance, Hitler was a bounder,^{xxxiv} but everything is alright again now. Evil is thus individualized by its monolithic unity. The Doctor must keep knocking down each instance of generic evil and facing the next: there is no end to it, there is no beginning, there is no middle, there is no locatedness, there is no temporality; there is absolutely no change.

A sociopathic abscess: when the postcolonial transition becomes present

It would be remiss to offer this analysis and to gloss over the exceptions; they are few but important. *Doctor Who* is a product of many authors over many years. It, at least, is not produced in a universe of its own philosophy: it has change.

In a few serials we are offered glimpses of the sociopathic abscess. They are remarkable by their presence: they carry rhetorical power because they are so rare in *Doctor Who*. In the new series, two incidents stand out in this regard. The first, in *Human Nature* (2007), places Martha in a maid's job at an English private boys school in 1913, without the presence of the Doctor. Some of the boys make racist remarks about her, but more potently, we bear witness to how things have changed when a white nurse refuses to believe that Martha is a medical student in the future, saying, "Women might train to be doctors, but hardly a skivvy and hardly one of your colour." Martha must then prove herself credible. The scene does sting, but its impact is moderated both by its occurrence in 'the dark ages' of the 20th century, and by the fact that the Doctor is absent, reinforcing even here that his presence is what is needed to make things better.

The second glimpse is more striking. It is almost a throwaway line in *Planet of the Ood*, when the Doctor and Donna discover, to their horror, containers full of thousands of slave Ood, ready for export:

Donna: A great big empire built on slavery.
The Doctor: It's not so different from your time.
Donna: Oi! I haven't got slaves!
The Doctor: Who d'you think made your clothes?

This statement is highly political in its naming of postcolonial economic arrangements as slavery, pulling no punches to acknowledge that a sociopathic abscess festers beneath the comfortable cosmopolitanism we want to believe we inhabit. While this story is a metaphor for colonialism more than a literal representation of humanity's future, the first serial to feature the Ood, *The Impossible Planet* (2006), was a cosmopolitan future vision. In it, the Doctor failed to recognise the Ood as slaves, and let them perish. He admits this in *Planet of the Ood* and reckons he "owes them one". Hence, the Ood story is one of the few in *Doctor Who* to link colonialism, the postcolonial transition, and a (retrospectively problematic) cosmopolitan future. This brings the future home: the 'cosmopolitan' humans in *The Impossible Planet* are really 'us' in the West, and we must now consider our options for negotiating a society in which we live side by side with slaves.

But the era of *Doctor Who* that delved most deeply into the sociopathic abscess was 1988-89, the last two seasons of the original series. It contributed a somewhat social realist aesthetic to the program that had rarely been used before, which set the scene for the new series' assertive engagement with the cosmopolitan aspects of contemporary Western life. The Doctor's companion in this era, Ace, is the most situated of all the original series companions. While we had known aspects of companions' back-stories before, in 16 year old Londoner Ace we are forced to deal with an agonistic relationship to her home suburb of Perivale, and tortured ambivalent

This is the submitted version of a paper that has been published with minor changes in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45(2): 207-225.

feelings towards her mum, who she hates yet feels guilty about. In *Survival* (1989), we visit Perivale and meet some of Ace's teenage friends, including Ange the depressed and hay-feverish animal rights campaigner who thought Ace was either dead or gone to Birmingham. Ace is thus shown to inhabit a very particular time and place: she is not merely human, not merely English, not merely from London, not merely a teenager. There is nothing generic about Ace. She is from *somewhere*, at *some time*, and she is most decidedly *someone*.

Ace is in fact very specifically white. Her whiteness has meaning in the society she inhabits. While there are elements of Ace's tenure on *Doctor Who* that paint a diverse picture without remark — such as the fact that one of Ace's Perivale friends, Shreela, is of South Asian descent — in other places it is problematized. In *Battlefield* (1989), Ace makes friends with a young Asian woman, Shou Yuing. When an evil force uses psychological tricks to turn the two against each other, Ace calls Shou Yuing “a yellow slant eyed —” . . . and does not finish. It is at this point that she and Shou Yuing realise something is wrong and reconcile. But the potency of hearing racist slurs from the mouth of our hero, the tortured child who is the primary point of audience identification, is strong indeed. We know that Ace is opposed to racism because in a previous serial set in 1963, *Remembrance of the Daleks* (1988), she became angry and disillusioned with new white friend Mike when she discovered that his mum wouldn't allow “coloureds” in her boarding house, and that Mike himself belonged to a nationalist organisation. Given this, the racist words that emerge from Ace's mouth suggest an ambivalence in *Doctor Who* about the nature of good and evil and their relationship to racist oppression. Ace is neither purely good nor bad; she is neither the purely anti-racist hero nor the purely racist villain. She is a product of her society, and it

is complicated, so she must be aware of and fight what society does to her. Ace *cannot* be colour-blind in a world in which race matters.

Two further incidents from this era reinforce the material significance of race. In *Remembrance of the Daleks*, the Doctor orders a mug of tea in a café, and discusses the implications of having sugar in it with the black man who works there, John. John notes that his father was a cane cutter. He continues, “If this sugar thing had never started, my great grandfather wouldn’t have been kidnapped, chained up and sold in Kingston in the first place. I’d be a African.” This colonial history is framed within the context of the postcolonial racist attitudes exhibited by Mike and his mum, humble and ordinary nice white Londoners from the time of *Doctor Who*’s beginnings.^{xxxv} It also mirrors the central plot of the serial, a eugenics war between alien Dalek factions. As the Doctor observes, there is no escaping the ripples of the past: they have impacts in the present.

Further postcolonial framing is presented in *Ghost Light*. This complex serial is set in a Victorian mansion in Perivale in the 19th century. Its theme is evolution, and references to British colonialism also abound. The main plot concerns a cosmic taxonomist who dislikes change and wants to destroy the Earth because it evolves and gets ‘out of control’, ruining his classification of Earth’s inhabitants. Colonialism is embodied by a mad explorer resembling Henry Morton Stanley, who searches for himself in ‘the interior’ of the mansion. These two themes are discursively linked by Ace’s contribution to the plot. Ace burnt down the mansion 100 years later at age 13, and in a powerful moment she reveals the reason:

When I lived in Perivale, me and my best mate, we dossed around together. We’d out-dare each other and things. Skiving off, stupid things. Then they burnt out Manesha’s flat. White kids firebombed it. I didn’t care anymore.

Ace explains that she jumped the wall of the mansion because she was angry. Inside the house she was frightened by something, so burnt the house to the ground. The nature of

the horror, she finds out by the serial's end, is the ghost of the cosmic taxonomist: the haunting spectre of the classificatory gaze which seeks fixed ahistoricism, and cannot cope with the unpredictable and material temporality of evolution and change.

Once the taxonomist is dispensed with, the colonialist explorer leaves the Earth with an assorted rabble of characters: a perpetually mutating alien, a Neanderthal, and a former experimental 'control' who, Pygmalion style, wants to be "lady-like". They are refugees from Western imperialism and science who must deal with and heal each others' particular brands of baggage to survive. This offers a solution to Ace's problem: that her ideal of a cosmopolitan utopia (playing with her friend Manesha) was dashed by the grim realities of postcolonial materiality. Understanding the horror helps her let go of her fear, and shows her that denying reality does not solve the problem. Ace must surrender the teleological myth, but she gains confidence in her ability to cope with whatever is to come. Here, then, finally, is the postcolonial sociopathic abscess in all its nakedness — racist violence, diasporic trauma, global capitalist 'slavery' — linking past and present with an unknown but promising future.

4. Conclusion

If the serials discussed here are mapped on a timeline of their production dates, they form a more or less linear path of colonialism (predominantly 1960s and 1970s) / postcolonial transition (predominantly 1980s) / cosmopolitan presents and futures (predominantly 2000s). This no doubt maps broad trends in British public political discourse. But of interest is the model of humanity discursively hypothesized by the dominant stages in the journey. The anti-colonialism stories posit a sameness between colonized and colonizer, avoiding any *terra nullius* doubts we may raise about the capacity of the indigenous to self rule. The cosmopolitanism stories also posit a

sameness between all peoples — correction, all people, for there are no different *peoples* in *Doctor Who*'s cosmopolitan future. Not only that, but the new series posits a sameness between all societies, even extending back through time into the 'Age of Reason' era of the African slave trade. All of this combines to form a hypothesis of the essential, cosmopolitan, (Westernized) human. This undoes political work that has sought to problematize such monocultural assumptions, and to articulate the spatial and temporal specificities of colonialism and its consequences.

However, we may take heart in the few *Doctor Who* serials, mostly from the late 1980s but encouragingly also from recent years, that make an effort to honour the historicity of oppression and the sociopathic abscess that is postcolonial modernity. To heal an abscess one must engage with pus; only by grappling with the pain will we find our way to new futures.^{xxxvi}

Notes

ⁱ BBC News, Dr Who 'longest-running sci-fi' (28 September 2006). Retrieved 1 September 2009 at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/5390372.stm.

ⁱⁱ Verity Lambert, prod., *Doctor Who*, BBC, 1963. For complete original series production credits, see BBC, "Episode Guide", Doctor Who Classic Series (2009), www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/classic/episodeguide/index.shtml and IMDb, "'Doctor Who' (1963)", The Internet Movie Database (2009), www.imdb.com/title/tt0056751/.

ⁱⁱⁱ Phil Collinson, prod., *Doctor Who*, BBC, 2005. For complete new series production credits, see BBC, Doctor Who The Official Site (2009), www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/ and IMDb, "'Doctor Who' (2005)", The Internet Movie Database (2009), www.imdb.com/title/tt0436992/.

^{iv} Seasons are confusingly called ‘series’ in the new series of *Doctor Who*; the 2005 season is called ‘Series 1’, the 2006 season ‘Series 2’ and so on. To avoid confusion I refer to them as seasons. In the original series, serials had titles, but in the new series it is episodes which have titles. The titles I give for serials from the new series are taken from the first episode of a serial, e.g. the 2007 serial made up of the three episodes *Utopia*, *The Sound of Drums* and *Last of the Time Lords* is referred to as *Utopia*.

^v Peter B Gregg, “England looks to the future: the cultural forum model and *Doctor Who*”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 37, 4 (2004), 648-661. IMDb, ““Doctor Who’ (2005) Awards”, The Internet Movie Database (2009). Retrieved 1 September 2009 at www.imdb.com/title/tt0436992/awards.

^{vi} John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*, London: Macmillan Press, 1983. Jonathan Bignell, “The child as addressee, viewer and consumer in mid-1960s *Doctor Who*”, in David Butler, ed., *Time And Relative Dissertations In Space: Critical perspectives on Doctor Who*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, 43-55.

^{vii} *ibid.*

^{viii} U Kalpagam, “Temporalities, history and routines of rule in colonial India”, *Time & Society*, 8, 1 (1999), 141-159. David Lloyd, “Regarding Ireland in a post-colonial frame”, *Cultural Studies*, 15, 1 (2001), 12-32. Eric Hirsch, “Valleys of historicity and ways of power among the Fuyuge”, *Oceania*, 77, 2 (2007), 158-171.

^{ix} Discussed by Hazel V Carby, “Becoming modern racialized subjects: detours through our pasts to produce ourselves anew”, *Cultural Studies*, 23, 4 (2009), 624-657.

^x Alec Charles, “The ideology of anachronism: television, history and the nature of time”, in David Butler, ed., *Time And Relative Dissertations In Space: Critical*

perspectives on Doctor Who, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, pp.108-122.

^{xi} For a discussion of this discourse see Bruce Buchan and Mary Heath, “Savagery and civilization: From terra nullius to the ‘tide of history’”, *Ethnicities*, 6, 1 (2006), 5-26.

^{xii} Real world consequences of this demand are discussed by Leanne R Simpson, “Anticolonial strategies for the recovery and maintenance of indigenous knowledge”, *American Indian Quarterly*, 28, 3&4 (2004), 373-384, and Lesley JF Green, “‘Indigenous knowledge’ and ‘science’: reframing the debate on knowledge diversity”, *Archaeologies-Journal of the World Archaeological Congress*, 4, 1 (2008), 144-163.

^{xiii} Andrew Fitzmaurice, “The genealogy of *Terra Nullius*”, *Australian Historical Studies*, 38, 129 (2007), 1-15.

^{xiv} “Savagery and civilization”.

^{xv} Although the principle of *terra nullius* remains relevant, the term’s etymology is widely misunderstood, so its use including in legal cases has frequently been anachronistic. “The genealogy of *Terra Nullius*”.

^{xvi} Original series serials representing humanity’s present or future as multiracial, multiethnic and/or internationalist include *The Daleks’ Master Plan* (1965), *The Tenth Planet* (1966), *The Moonbase* (1967), *The Wheel in Space* (1968), *The Seeds of Death* (1969), *The Mind of Evil* (1971), *The Mutants* (1972), *The Robots of Death* (1977), *Warriors of the Deep* (1984), *Resurrection of the Daleks* (1984), *The Happiness Patrol* (1988), *Battlefield* (1989) and *Survival* (1989).

^{xvii} Excluded from the companions list are characters who only appeared in 1-2 episodes. I include Jackie with TARDIS Index File, “Jackie Tyler”, Doctor Who Wiki (24 August 2009). Retrieved 1 September 2009 at tardis.wikia.com/wiki/Jackie_Tyler.

^{xviii} Richard Stokes, prod., *Torchwood*, BBC, 2006.

^{xix} Tim Hunter, “Parallel universe”, *The Age*, Green Guide (14 June 2007), 3.

^{xx} Ciar Byrne, “Doctor Who gets his first black assistant”, *The Independent*, (5 July 2006), online; Adam Sherwin, “Sidekick whose time has come”, *The Times*, (5 July 2006), online; Adam Sherwin, “The Doctor returns with a sassy sidekick. Who?”, *The Times*, (22 March 2007), online; Richard Simpson, “Exit Billie as Doctor Who gets first black side-kick”, *The Daily Mail*, (5 July 2006), online.

^{xxi} See, for example, neadods, “Mickey, Martha, and the Message that Doesn’t Belong on Who”, Life on Martha (1 July 2007). Retrieved 1 September 2009 at community.livejournal.com/lifeonmartha/259659.html?thread=2812491.

^{xxii} But see Nyder, The Evolving Guide to Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Moments in Doctor Who (October 2006). Retrieved 1 September 2009 at www.nyder.com/stuff/whosqueer.html.

^{xxiii} Such stories include *Aliens of London*, *The Christmas Invasion* (2005), *School Reunion*, *Rise of the Cybermen*, *Fear Her*, *Army of Ghosts*, *The Runaway Bride* (2006), *Smith and Jones*, *The Lazarus Experiment*, *Blink*, *Utopia* (2007), *Partners in Crime*, *The Sontaran Stratagem*, *Turn Left* and *The Stolen Earth* (2008).

^{xxiv} *The End of the World*, *The Long Game*, *Bad Wolf* (2005), *New Earth*, *The Impossible Planet* (2006), *Gridlock*, 42, *Utopia*, *Voyage of the Damned* (2007), *Planet of the Ood*, *The Doctor’s Daughter*, *Silence in the Library*, *Midnight* and *Turn Left* (2008) all feature prominent black and Asian characters.

^{xxv} Including the transgendered Cassandra (*The End of the World*), the married lesbian “Cassini sisters” (*Gridlock*), and a woman with a female partner (*Midnight*).

^{xxvi} Indeed, humanity *never* makes it to utopia. *Utopia* (2007) is set at the end of the universe, where humanity survives on the last cold rock and are offered a glimmer of hope in a place they call ‘Utopia’, which turns out to be a cruel ruse.

^{xxvii} BBC, “The Savages”, Doctor Who Classic Series Photonovels (2009). Retrieved 1 September 2009 at www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/classic/photonovels/savages/intro.shtml.

^{xxviii} This equal opportunity casting does not extend to the casting of the Doctor himself, as Charles notes in “The ideology of anachronism”, and as the recent casting of the Eleventh Doctor has borne out. Anon., “Lester explains away black Doctor Who”, The First Post, (6 January 2009). Retrieved 1 September 2009 at www.thefirstpost.co.uk/people,1816,lester-laments-no-black-doctor-who,67994.

^{xxix} Charles contends the new *Doctor Who*’s liberalism is in fact radical “in an era in which ideological absolutism is dominant”. Alec Charles, “War without end?: Utopia, the family, and the post-9/11 world in Russell T. Davies’s *Doctor Who*”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 35, 3 (2008), 452.

^{xxx} Chapman describes the program and the Doctor thus: “The entire series, moreover, is imbued with an unmistakably liberal ethos. The Doctor stands for the values of liberty, freedom, equality, justice and tolerance; he is implacably opposed to totalitarianism, slavery, inequality, injustice and prejudice.” James Chapman, *Inside the TARDIS: The worlds of Doctor Who: A Cultural History*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2006, p. 7. See also *The Unfolding Text*.

^{xxxi} When interviewed, *Doctor Who* fans were unable to agree on the Doctor’s political commitments aside from the fact that he fights baddies. Alan McKee, “Is *Doctor Who* political?”, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7, (2004), 201-217.

^{xxxii} *The Unfolding Text*.

^{xxxiii} As Charles details: “[*Doctor Who*’s] pseudo-pluralistic conflation or assimilation of all times, places, histories and societies is at once eminently televisual, totalistic and imperialistic”. “The ideology of anachronism”, p. 121. For a discussion of real world links between cosmopolitanism and imperialism see Brett Bowden, *The Empire of*

Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

^{xxxiv} Notoriously, the Doctor calls Hitler a “bounder” in *The Dæmons* (1971).

^{xxxv} *Remembrance of the Daleks* was a 25th anniversary story and was set in November 1963, the time of the broadcast of the first episode, *An Unearthly Child* (1963).

^{xxxvi} I thank Ida Nursoo for invaluable advice on the manuscript and Rachel Morgain, Cameron Cutts and Will Grant for their clarifying insights on issues discussed in the paper.