ariel: a review of international english literature
Vol. 56 No. 2 Pages 31–54

Subjects Implicated in Imperial Intimacies: Identity, Reason, Power, and the Reparatory Justice Movement

Jarula M. I. Wegner

Abstract: This article examines how people implicated in imperial histories may approach how they think about themselves and their relationship to power in order to support reparations for the transatlantic enslavement and trade of Africans. It analyses Michael Rothberg's political theory of the implicated subject in relation to Hazel V. Carby's historical biography *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (2019) to illuminate how these two works help us think about the reparatory justice movement. Carby's discussion enables a more complex understanding of identity, reason, and power than how they are implied in the theory of the implicated subject. First, the theory of implication seems to dismiss the concept of identity yet leaves untouched problematic presuppositions about it. Second, rather than assuming a self-reflective understanding of complicity, social justice, and solidarity, the theory of implication needs to confront questions of open, public, and transcultural reasoning and debate. Third, the theory of the implicated subject negatively considers power as exercised in social situations, which subverts the possibility of the alliances that are necessary for successful social justice movements. Because implication is an inevitable condition of globalized modernity and beyond, it serves us well to consider both its negative and positive aspects, something Carby's biography helps us to do.

Keywords: African diaspora, transatlantic slave trade, reparations, complicity, critical theory

I. Introduction

In his 2017 lecture on "The Global Reparatory Justice Movement," Hilary Beckles, an economic historian and chair of the Caribbean Community Commission on Reparation and Social Justice, outlines the historical stages of African enslavement, liberation, and demands for reparations. Beckles divides the struggle against enslavement into three distinct and consecutive phases and argues that it took the nineteenth century to eradicate chattel slavery in the western hemisphere. In the twentieth century, constitutional civil and human rights were established for the descendants of enslaved peoples in the West; the twenty-first century, Beckles contends, "is going to be the era of reparatory justice" ("Global"). While the movement's history goes back to at least the eighteenth century, it has gained global momentum in the twenty-first century (Araujo 167), with Caribbean intellectuals making crucial conceptual and political contributions (Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt* 211–29).

The reparatory justice movement calls for detailed investigation into the wide-ranging and long-lasting social, economic, and political effects of the transatlantic enslavement and trade of Africans. Caribbean academics, advocates, and artists speak from a region where some of the longest-standing and cruellest forms of enslavement took place (Rauhut 138); they are among the driving forces articulating and disseminating claims for reparatory justice (Shepherd, "Past Imperfect" 37).[1] One of the movement's central demands—regardless of whether it is articulated academically, politically, or aesthetically—is that alliances must be forged across cultures, continents, and ethnicities. Shepherd, for instance, urges Britain's "present-day descendants and beneficiaries" ("Past Imperfect" 41) of the transatlantic enslavement and trade of Africans to join the movement. She explains: "We submit that there is a way to get us to a more perfect future: it is called owning up to the past, learning from past tragedies, and committing to a reparatory justice program" (41). Questions of how to relate the past to the present and establish alliances across communities are therefore central to the reparatory justice movement.

In 2019, two critically acclaimed publications contributed to this ongoing conversation, albeit from different angles. Michael Rothberg explicitly wants *The Implicated Subject* to intervene in contemporary political discourse (19) and Hazel V. Carby's historical biography *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* investigates the genealogies of her white Welsh mother and her black Jamaican father to reveal the wide-ranging and long-lasting influences of the British empire on both its colonies and the imperial metropolis. Rothberg's political theory and Carby's personal history further the conversation on African enslavement's lasting impact and the potential for alliances in the present.

Taking Beckles' historical outline and Shepherd's call for alliances seriously, this essay engages with Rothberg's and Carby's work to analyse possibilities for a global reparatory movement. I will explore some connections between Rothberg's implicated subject and Carby's imperial intimacies. Instead of applying the theory to the historical biography, however, I will use the historical biography to re-evaluate Rothberg's theory. I argue that Carby's biography of empire enables a reconsideration of key concepts in Rothberg's approach to implication, particularly the roles of identity, reason, and power as well as the idea of implication itself. Following a short outline of the two texts, I analyse Carby's discussions of these concepts to explore how they affect the theory of the implicated subject. I argue that we have to reconsider the implicated subject's notions of identity, reason, power, and implication to empower the global reparatory justice movement.

II. Implicated Subjects in Imperial Intimacies

In *The Implicated Subject*, Rothberg widens scholarly debates concerning entanglements in historical and present-day injustices beyond a focus on victims and perpetrators. He introduces the concept of implication as an umbrella term designed to extend discussions concerning witnesses, bystanders, beneficiaries, and other people with complex responsibilities for injustices (*Implicated Subject* 13, 20). Rothberg wants to overcome the divisions between, on the one side, historically victimized communities who insist on representing themselves and spearheading

the struggle for social justice and, on the other side, politically engaged people across the globe who are not necessarily victims or perpetrators but consider themselves, their ancestry, and their societies as partly responsible for historical and structural suffering. According to Rothberg, the latter groups need to admit their "implication in collective scenarios of violence" (*Implicated Subject* 28), recognize "the asymmetry of vulnerability" (28), and build "differentiated solidarities"[2] (28) for the pursuit of "social justice" (15). Put differently, individuals' identification as implicated subjects should inspire a process of self-reflection that leads to empowering alliances.

According to Rothberg, the theory of implication promises to be particularly productive in conjunction with artistic, literary, and historical works such as Carby's *Imperial Intimacies* (*Implicated Subject* 199). Carby traces her parents' ancestries to their nineteenth-century appearance in the slave registers in Jamaica and eighteenth-century documents in the archives of British municipalities, respectively. Her painstaking research reveals complex and unsettling entanglements between her black Jamaican father's and her white Welsh mother's ancestors. Through detailed descriptions, presentation of everyday objects, and patient questioning, Carby's text excavates "[t]he closely woven political, economic, social and cultural ties between Jamaica and England [which] formed an imperial intimacy that had been rendered historically invisible by the turn of the twentieth century" (201). The biography is characterized by a tireless analysis of individual struggles against social, economic, and political forces. It examines how societies were produced in the colonial margins and imperial centres as well as how these processes impacted individual subjectivities: how they reasoned and struggled for agency. In this way, Carby's narrative reveals "the continuing aftermath of enslavement" (Carby 4) that motivates the reparatory justice movement.

The effectiveness of this troubling narrative is supported by its being a biography, a mass-produced literary text, rather than a classical historiographical study.[3] Astrid Erll explains that, in addition to their formal features, "global media cultures and popular representations of the past play an important role as both expression and driving force of the current 'memory boom'"[4] (*Memory in Culture* 5). While this intensified

interest in memories of the past often focused on World War II and the Holocaust more specifically, Rothberg suggests in *Multidirectional Memory* that these have also inspired debates concerning the transatlantic enslavement and trade of Africans, or what Beckles and Shepherd term the "African holocaust" (Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt* 164; Shepherd, "Jamaica and the Debate" 241). The memory boom coincided with and fuelled a memoir boom (Smith and Watson xii), which brought often troubling historical events before the eyes of a wider and more diverse readership than theoretical and historiographic texts tend to reach. Carby's historical biography is a case in point. Although the theoretically sophisticated text is written by a well-established scholar and builds on more than twenty years of archival research, it is an eloquent and thrilling literary narrative with accessible writing and compelling photographs. *Imperial Intimacies* narrates a wide-ranging, complicated, and cruel history in a lucid, concrete, and personal way. Carby demonstrates how the personal and self-reflective genre of biography becomes a source of wider public debate.

While the biography does not place explicit demands on its readers, the imperial intimacies between the Caribbean colonies and the British metropolis enable a new political awareness. Reading the text, readers are confronted with the manifold entanglements of the former colonies with the imperial centre and how they continue to impact contemporary societies. According to Rothberg, the concept of the implicated subject allows readers to turn such insights into a "new politics," a new way for people to engage with one another "across and beyond nation-states" (*Implicated Subject* 28). To understand this new politics, it is necessary to clarify how individuals identify their complex responsibility, how they engage it cognitively, and how it establishes, negotiates, and dissolves alliances. That is to say, in order to see how readers' engagement with *Imperial Intimacies* may become politically effective, it is necessary to illuminate what it means to identify as an implicated subject, how a person might engage this politics intellectually, and what this implication implies for the person's political engagement in and across communities. I contend that if the implicated subjects whom Rothberg focuses on, "[p]rivileged consumers in the Global North" (*Implicated*

Subject 12), read Carby's memoir and realise that they may have benefitted from or even contributed to the continuation of imperial exploitation initiated by the transatlantic enslavement and trade of Africans, they will be better equipped theoretically and practically to support the growing reparatory justice movement.

The next three sections therefore analyse the concepts of identity, reasoning, and power in *The Implicated Subject* and how they can be reconceived through a close reading of *Imperial Intimacies*. In the fourth and final section, I describe how these concepts impact the implicated subject and how this subject may be transformed from merely reflecting on historical wrongs to supporting reparations.

III. Identity

For Rothberg, implication is not an identity but a position. He writes that "[i]mplicated subjects neither possess an identity nor arise from a process of identification. . . . Rather, to be an implicated subject is to occupy a particular type of *subject position* in a history of injustice or structure of inequality" (*Implicated Subject* 48; emphasis in original). The shift from the concept of identity to that of position suggests a turn towards a less essentialist and more historical and contextual consideration of the subject. Such a shift responds to communitarian critiques, sometimes described as "identity politics"[5] (Combahee River Collective 365), which dismiss attempts at articulating identity claims across communities. In theory, therefore, because implication is not an issue of identity but of position, questions of identity do not matter.

But how does one come to occupy such an implicated position? Implication is established, it turns out, through familiar identity categories such as race, nationality, and religion. From the very start, Rothberg underscores the concept's "particular affinity to questions of race and racism" (*Implicated Subject* 2) and focuses especially on "white residents of the US" (10) and "what it means to be part of the Jewish diaspora" (18). It may be possible to consider such categories as positions, but they are undeniably categories of identity. Although Rothberg introduces the concept of position in opposition to identity, their affinity or even congruence is not surprising. As Mary Eagleton notes, Adrienne Rich's

"Notes Toward a Politics of Location" has been foundational to discussions of positionality (299). Explaining "[t]he politics of location," Rich writes, "[e]ven to begin with my body I have to say that from the outset that body had more than one identity" (215). She continues by enumerating her race, nationality, and religion. The concept of position, in other words, requires identity categories and so too does the concept of implication (Wegner, "Michael Rothberg's *The Implicated*" 553).

One danger in shifting discussions from a seemingly problematic concept such as identity to a seemingly unproblematic one such as position is that the bedevilling assumptions that inspire the shift may infiltrate the hoped-for solution. Stuart Hall describes this cat-and-mouse game in relation to the sliding signifier of race. Hall notes "how symptomatic it is of racial discourse per se that the physical or biological trace, having been shown out of the front door, tends to sidle around the edge of the veranda and climb back in through the pantry window!" (*The Fateful Triangle* 37). Similarly, the implicated subject is explicitly "not an ontological category" (Rothberg, *Implicated Subject* 22),[6] yet concepts of "race" (2) such as "whiteness" (18) and "blackness" (67); religion, such as "Jewishness" (144)[7]; and geographical location, such as "the Global North" (12) reinstate essentialising categories. The decontextualized use of such terms reinvokes static and essentialist assumptions that undermine the historicity of subject positions.

Carby's biography, by contrast, more radically historicizes the processes that shape identities. She explains the underlying strategy in relation to the concept of "race," which is, as mentioned, one of the most recalcitrant identity categories. The term "blackness" appears only once in her text, in quotation marks, and is immediately followed by a discussion of race as a concept: "The only way to understand the complex configurations and connotations of 'race' is in the context of particular times and places. I use the word racialization to capture the practices and processes involved in the calculations and impositions of difference, all of which have their own logic but are not eternally fixed" (Carby 65). Carby shifts the discussion from race to racialization—from being to process—in order to highlight the identity category as an effect of historical processes.

In addition to historicizing identity categories, *Imperial Intimacies* rarely focusses on a single identity category. Instead, it details how race, class, and gender function in conjunction with one another (2). Describing eighteenth-century Jamaica, Carby writes that her great-great-great-great-grandfather Lilly Carby "was white" but "because he was only the poor son of a Lincolnshire carpenter, an ex-foot soldier and ex-plantation bookkeeper, his name would have carried no weight with the elite members of the free black community" (291). In addition to revealing the interdependence of race and class, the passage complicates attempts to distinguish identity from subject position. It shows that bypassing the concept of identity in order to discuss position is likely to reintroduce essentialist assumptions about identity. Rather than dismissing seemingly simplistic identity categories for seemingly complex subject positions, the passage demonstrates the usefulness of explicitly and critically addressing the historical constitution and diverse affiliations of a subject's identity.

The historical constitution of subject identities is illuminated by Hall, whose definition also functions as an epigraph to Carby's biography (vii). According to Hall,

> identity is not only a story, a narrative we tell ourselves about ourselves; it is a set of stories that change with historical circumstances, and identity shifts with the way in which we think, hear and experience them. Far from only coming from the still small point of truth inside us, identities actually come from outside; they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition. ("Negotiating Caribbean Identities" 30 [2001])[8]

Identity, Hall argues, is not "the still small point of truth inside us"—that is, something static, natural, or essential—but constructed and dynamic. Constituted by the interaction between self and others, it is a psychological and social process. Identity remains an incomplete, heterogeneous, and ongoing construction (Hall, *Familiar Stranger* 16).

Hall's reference to a set of stories indicates the historicity of identity as well as its inherent multiplicity.

A subject's multiple identity categories and related affiliations highlight the fact that solidarity sought by revealing implication will hardly ever be obvious, exclusive, or unchallenged. Amartya Sen writes that "[a]ny person is a member of many different groups (without this being in any way a contradiction), and each of these collectivities, to all of which this person belongs, gives him or her [or them] a potential identity which—depending on the context—can be quite important" (*Identity and Violence* 46). Because people have many different affiliations, they tend not to register their implication intuitively.

Lilly Carby, for instance, was born in Coleby, south of the English city of Lincoln. He was the son of a carpenter who was driven by poverty to join the British army and sent to the colony of Jamaica as a foot soldier where he used his privilege as a white, male, British subject to become a bookkeeper at a plantation before establishing his own small-scale plantation that included enslaved Africans (Carby 260–306). The complex, multiple, and dynamic affiliations of nationality, ethnicity, gender, education, location, and so on demand similarly agile processes of analysis. The reparatory justice movement emphasises the importance of processing the historical data in ways that ensure it is accessible for public education, government negotiation, and court cases (Shepherd, "Jamaica and the Debate" 245–46). Each of these contexts demands not only the evidence of historical atrocities but also evidence of their lasting consequences for contemporary societies. Rather than being intuitively clear, these complex relations require detailed explanations of how the past impacts present identities. Sen explains that "[t]here is no presumption that the recognition or assertion of an identity must necessarily be a ground for solidarity in practical decisions; this has to be a matter for further reasoning and scrutiny. Indeed, the need for reasoning is thoroughly pervasive at every stage of identity-based thoughts and decisions" (*Identity and Violence* 32).[9] Identity itself, Sen implies, does not precede reasoning but results from it. In order to explore identity, and specifically the reparatory justice movement's demands for solidarity,

one must consider the processes, challenges, and possibilities of reasoning. With the concept of "reasoning," I am suggesting the social process of articulating and listening to arguments in the pursuit of truth and agreement, which Leonard E. Barrett Sr. describes as an established and crucial practice in the black diasporic communities of Rastafarians (232, 241, 242). In philosophical discourse, this process is referred to as "public reasoning" (Sen, *Idea* xii–xiii).

IV. Reasoning Through One's Identity

Regarding the issue of reasoning, *The Implicated Subject* focuses on self-reflection. "The attention to one's own position as implicated subject," Rothberg writes, "can provoke more robust and politically efficacious forms of self-reflection" (*Implicated Subject* 145).[10] He describes reflection on one's subject position as a necessary precondition for the complex political forms of solidarity to which his concept of implication aspires. This approach to reasoning, with a focus not on public debate but on self-reflection, is characterized by American identity politics. Polarized and polemical debates concerning personal and social identities have left people frustrated and sceptical, inspiring a turn inwards, away from wider public reasoning (Combahee River Collective 365).[11] The concept of implication picks up on this inward turn in order to build solidarity across communities through self-reflection (Rothberg, *Implicated Subject* 36).

Yet in the face of the complex, wide-ranging, and long-standing historical injustices addressed by the reparatory justice movement, an appeal to self-reflection falls short of the challenges that reparations undeniably require. As I've argued elsewhere, Rothberg's strategies of introspection, self-reflection, and remembrance are insufficient tools with which to approach complex historical and structural challenges, such as those the reparatory justice movement seeks to address (Wegner, "Michael Rothberg's" 552). As Rothberg outlines the concept, one moment in particular highlights the contrast between self-reflection and public reasoning. Rothberg quotes a much-debated statement by the Combahee River Collective. The Collective writes that, as black feminists, they "might use [their] position at the bottom . . . to make a clear

leap into revolutionary action. If black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since [their] freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (Combahee River Collective 368). Historically, this statement was crucial in highlighting the unique experience of black feminist women in America and introducing the new concept of identity politics. Despite its unquestionable achievements, however, the statement also suggests at least two questionable assumptions. First, although black women in America in the 1970s (and later) certainly suffered under white supremacy, they were, statistically speaking, relatively less deprived than, for instance, Indigenous Americans. If we look beyond the US to the African diaspora more generally, black women in America also tend to be privileged in comparison to black diasporic subjects in the Global South.[12] As the concept of intersectionality has taught us, a person can be oppressed in one way yet enjoy privileges in another. This simply goes to say that considering oneself "at the bottom" in one respect does not exclude the possibility of enjoying privileges in other ways.[13] Second, the statement that "if black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free" underestimates the diversity and specificity of interlocking yet discrete forms of oppression. The collective is not claiming that all oppressions are the same but that black women experience interlocking forms of oppressions and that addressing the root causes would necessarily benefit others. Yet I would suggest that addressing their distinctive and uneven experiences of oppression may not fully solve those of others.[14] While the collective's statement is important in enabling a new form of politics, it also deserves a closer exploration of the politics it enables across differences. Rothberg describes the statement as "the collective's most powerful insight" (*Implicated Subject* 36) and although he later admits to being "skeptical of assertions of purity" (49) such as "pure" victim positions, he does not engage critically the details of the Collective's statement. A focus on self-reflection rather than public debate across communities precludes such a critique because it stifles the possibilities of transcultural processes of reasoning and building alliances. Engagement in an open, heterogeneous, and ongoing process of public reasoning is, however, a vital step in creating the awareness,

understanding, and agreement necessary for the pursuit of social justice, including reparatory justice (Beckles, "Global").

Carby's biography, for example, describes an ongoing and painstaking pursuit of collecting relevant information, analysing it in minute detail, and presenting it for public scrutiny and debate. Carby continuously questions the past and tries to locate information "with an academic compass attracted by the lure of revelation, the hope of harvesting knowledge from the bleak years"—a process she describes as an attempt—"to create reason out of unreason" (113). The biography depicts her own activist engagement as well as her questioning of her grandmother Beatrice's political involvement:

> Did being excluded from such institutions [as girls' schools] and then working in domestic service breed desires for radical change in Beatrice? . . . Was she drawn to stand among the crowd of over 6,000 on Durdham Down and listen to [the suffragettes] Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst? Or, after work, did she attend the evening meetings in Colston Hall? (182–83)

In asking if "Beatrice attend[ed] any of their open-air public meetings" (182), the biography expresses the importance of social advocacy, public meetings, and open debates. Carby's analysis of her family's history highlights the value of public reasoning and protest beyond isolated and self-sufficient introspection. While presented in the personal genre of the biography, the text through its questioning mode and public circulation becomes a site and source of public reasoning. In the same spirit, Carby contends in her preface that an ideal reader "disagree[s] with and argue[s] against" (2–3) what they read. She suggests that the writer-reader relationship does not lead to like-mindedness but results in communicating and arguing across differences.

In support of such an approach to confronting complex challenges, Sen's *The Idea of Justice* offers a book-length study on the importance of public reasoning for social justice. He highlights "the deep and pervasive influence of society" (*Idea* 245) on individual thinking, choosing, and doing, thus underlining the fundamental impact of public debate

on individual reasoning. Just as Carby does in her historical analysis of Beatrice and Iris, Sen observes the centrality of public reasoning in the pursuit of social justice. He writes: "Understanding the demands of justice is not any more of a solitarist exercise than any other discipline of human understanding. When we try to determine how justice can be advanced, there is a basic need to public reasoning, involving arguments coming from different quarters and divergent perspectives" (*Idea* 392). Questions of social justice and the pursuit of objectivity and fairness, in other words, require a widening of public debate. Such debates across different quarters are necessary, Sen writes, because what other people "see from their respective perspectives of history and geography may help us to overcome our own parochialism" (*Idea* 130). In order to tackle complex forms of injustice, it would be misguided to rely only on self-reflection; instead, it is necessary to build on debates among people with different perspectives. The concept of the implicated subject itself is an important contribution to this form of open and ongoing public reasoning, as Rothberg's analyses connect different communities, continents, and cultures. His work highlights how these things relate to one another, the insights to be gained from exploring these relations, histories, and experiences, and how this knowledge might be used to address historical and contemporary injustices. But rather than turning inwards, it is important to turn outwards, to join wider debates across distances and differences in order to explore, discuss, and pursue social justice. For this reason, the reparatory justice movement emphasises "raising consciousness" (Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt* 228), engaging in "critical arguments" (228), and participating in "discourse" in the process of building alliances within the Caribbean and across the globe (228–29).[15]

To move from self-reflection to public debate, from self-analysis to dialogues between subjects and across communities, one must address questions of constituting, negotiating, and dissolving solidarities and alliances. It becomes urgent, in other words, to confront questions of power. I argue that power is involved in forming and dissolving solidarities because alliances and solidarities inevitably entail the exercise of power.

V. Power

The discussions of power in *The Implicated Subject* can be divided into those that describe aesthetic power and those that refer to social power. Aesthetic power is constituted by the beauty, complexity, portentousness, or relevance of an artwork (Rothberg, *Implicated Subject* 83), whereas social power is created by subjects engaging with one another or against each other (155). While one can be seen as a subject-object relation, the other can be viewed as an intersubjective relation. Rothberg describes aesthetic power in positive terms, such as "the rhetorical power" (*Implicated Subject* 83) of a novel, whereas he describes social power throughout the text in negative terms. This is clearest when he quotes Bruce Robbins' positive example of "empowered dissent" (Robbins 10) only to suggest "taking advantage of opportunities to redirect power against the systems that produce it" (Rothberg, *Implicated Subject* 21). Power here is not ethically neutral but rather, when it involves people, seems to originate from a source that needs to be opposed. Here and elsewhere, the implicated subject is described as opposing power—never as grasping it, for example, to enable a more just politics. If social manifestations of power are perceived in negative terms, then the only ethical actions possible originate from and return to a subject in social isolation—that is, opposed to any form of solidarity. Since the text only presents a positive idea of power in relation to aesthetics, but not in relation to politics, implicated subjects can offer only symbolic solidarity; they cannot become politically active.

Rothberg builds his concept of power on Foucault,[16] whose negative description of power is one of his most tenacious bequests to critical theoretical and political debates (Hacking 3). This negative evaluation is apparent throughout Foucault's work, including his last interviews and lectures (Bernstein 226–28). Richard J. Bernstein describes one of Foucault's last published essays as "an apologia" in this regard, "a succinct statement and defense of his own critical project" (211), including his negative assessment of power. In this essay, Foucault moves from Immanuel Kant's answer to the question "what is enlightenment?" as a philosophical interrogation of the present towards Charles Baudelaire's description of modern painting as "an attitude of modernity." Foucault

endorses this shift from a philosophical question to an attitude, a shift that also entails a moving from collective philosophical discourse towards individual aesthetic self-production ("What is Enlightenment?" 309). Foucault writes, "[T]he historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical" (316).[17] He ends the essay by emphasising the goal of individual freedom, not social justice. For Foucault, freedom does not emerge from a social engagement in power struggles but through the tireless and unremitting pursuit of individual freedom through aesthetic self-production. Such an approach to power is opposed to forms of solidarity seeking social and political impact.

Imperial Intimacies, by contrast, demonstrates that social power need not be described in solely negative terms. Granted, the text's detailed description of the colonisation of Caribbean dominions as a crucial factor in the modernization of imperial Britain is far from a celebration of the diverse manifestations of power. Indeed, as I've written previously, most of the text's descriptions highlight individuals' gruelling struggles against larger social, economic, and political forces (Wegner, "Hazel Carby" 180). Nonetheless, Carby not only describes an enslaver's probable sadistic pleasure in watching his female servant "plead with him because it would have confirmed that he had power over her" but also supposes that the servant "would have utilized all her powers of persuasion" in urging him to include her into his will to ensure that she would inherit a share of his property when he died (Carby 295). Power is described here not just as a force of oppression but also as one of negotiation and resistance. Carby describes individual and collective struggles for power and states that she "support[s] and admire[s] projects to reclaim, reconstruct and rehabilitate spaces of domesticity as sites of female power" (120). Power thus should not be conceived of only in negative terms; as the biography suggests, it also needs to be considered as a constructive and necessary source of transformation, especially in the pursuit of social justice. Similarly, Beckles considers power in its diverse historical forms, including, for example, both when a warship overpowered a slave revolt and when "Africans aboard the *Vigilantie* overpowered the crew and took control of the ship" (Beckles, *Britain's*

Black Debt 49). Most importantly, Beckles describes power as central to calls for reparatory justice (200). Building alliances across cultures, continents, and ethnicities increases the reparatory justice movement's political power and helps it achieve its aims.

VI. From an Implicated Object to an Empowered Subject

Rothberg assesses negatively not just social power but the implicated subject. He argues that the implicated are those who are advantaged by injustices, but not those who are disadvantaged by them (*Implicated Subject* 56), thus attributing an explicitly negative meaning to the concept. Rothberg opens his study with the declared goal of "dismantl[ing] the conditions of implication" (19) and concludes it by committing readers to "[t]he struggle against implication" (201). In doing so, he defines implication as a state that needs to be overcome.[18] His statement in the conclusion that "[t]he implicated subject is not something to celebrate" (200) highlights his negative evaluation of implication. The implicated subject thus functions similarly to terms like the parvenu ("parvenu"), the petit bourgeois ("petit bourgeois"), or, more recently, the hipster (Greif 219). These terms have pejorative connotations and refer to someone other than oneself. Rothberg's reflections on and descriptions of the implicated subject suggest an other, that is, less a subject than an implicated object.

This characterization makes it unlikely someone will identify themselves as an implicated subject. A concept that focuses on self-reflection but engenders a form of othering produces a paradox that arguably limits the concept's usefulness. Yet it is possible to reconceive of the concept in a much more neutral and politically effective way. It is worth considering that, historically, the term "implication" has not been used pejoratively in any consistent manner. Since the fifteenth century, it has been employed neutrally by a variety of fields across medical, logical, and linguistic contexts. In debates concerning the reparatory justice movement, implication is also employed as a neutral term (Shepherd, "Past Imperfect" 25). Even Rothberg initially defines it as drawing attention to "how we are 'folded into' (im-pli-cated in) events that at first

seem beyond our agency as individual subjects" (*Implicated Subject* 1). Implication here carries a neutral connotation.

Returning implication to its neutral meaning and employing it as an analytical category allows the concept to be more convincing and politically effective. The idea that people are folded into events that at first seem beyond our agency as individual subjects, because of intricate and complex world-spanning relations, is not new. Rothberg considers "capitalism at a global scale"[19] (*Implicated Subject* 12) as an important factor in implication, just as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels state that "[t]he need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" (39). Similarly, Édouard Glissant writes about the contemporary world that "[t]here is no place that does not have its elsewhere. . . . No place where it is not necessary to come as close as possible to figuring out this dialectic of interdependencies" (153). These connections, interdependencies, and implications are part and parcel of the "complexity of modern cultures" (Welsch 195). It is therefore questionable whether it is possible to dismantle this condition of human existence.

Imperial Intimacies repeatedly highlights the entangled processes of globalization and modernization. One example comes from Lilly Carby's life, who, as mentioned, arrives in Jamaica as a drafted footsoldier and realizes that his white masculinity positions him above enslaved African-Caribbeans (Carby 279). A second example comes from Hazel Carby's father, Carl, who becomes socially mobile through learning an accounting technique that—the biography emphasizes—was crucial for England's imperial expansion and exploitation (252). A third example is the increasing presence of bananas in nineteenth-century England: "The closely woven political, economic, social and cultural ties between Jamaica and England formed an imperial intimacy that had been rendered historically invisible by the turn of the twentieth century, but bananas were the tangible evidence of a connection" (201). Carby demonstrates how the relations between empire and colony are simultaneously deeply embedded in everyday life and erased from

public awareness, and indicates that globalization undeniably improved English subjects' quality of life while simultaneously exacerbating England's exploitative relationships with its colonies. She illustrates how England's—and more generally Europe's—wealth is built on imperial expansion and exploitative extraction. These connections and interdependencies in imperial intimacies, the biography shows, are potentially both negative and positive. Implication, the narrative suggests, makes subjects victims and agents of events as they are both shaped by and shape them.

Understanding implication as not purely negative but rather a condition of our existence that is created and shaped in countless ways through social dynamics such as colonization, globalization, and modernization makes the concept more useful. Identifying and conceptualizing implication as an inevitable condition for most people on this planet makes it possible to reconceive the idea as simultaneously challenging and empowering. Implication is challenging because the increasing connections, exchanges, and interdependencies we observe more often than not exceed our immediate experiential frameworks. Sen observes that "[w]e are increasingly linked not only by our mutual economic, social and political relations, but also by vaguely shared but far-reaching concerns about injustice and inhumanity that challenge our world, and the violence and terrorism that threaten it. . . . There are few non-neighbours left in the world today" (*Idea* 173). Sen highlights that increasing relations brought on by globalization embed people and societies in complex forms of interdependencies and responsibilities that more often than not exceed the ability of people to act upon and change them. But beyond this immense and hardly fathomable challenge, implication is also potentially empowering because a "[g]lobal discussion of the urgency" of issues of justice "can be the basis of a constructive search for the ways and means of reducing global injustice" (Sen, *Identity* 148). A public discourse that is conducted across distances and differences, Sen argues, reduces the threat of parochial perspectives and increases the possibility of impartial judgements as well as social justice. In transforming the implicated subject from a pejorative to an analytic concept that

encompasses both negative and positive experiences, it becomes possible to see the challenges and the necessary means of tackling them. In this vein, Shepherd writes of the reparatory justice movement:

> The fractured state of international relations today is deeply rooted in the various human rights violations committed under colonialism. . . . Redressing such historic wrongs could help to heal many of the wounds of the past, bring about reconciliation in the present day and advance the project of globalisation in all its positive possibilities. ("Jamaica and the Debate" 248)

While Shepherd emphasises the cruel history of globalisation—the fact that the transatlantic enslavement and trade of Africans as well as the colonisation of the Caribbean enabled Europe's industrialisation and modernisation—she nonetheless welcomes globalisation's positive potential.

In order to reconceive of the implicated subject as a neutral analytical category, it is useful to move beyond romantic delusions of dismantling implication and reconsider the categories of identity, reason, and power that constitute it. As the preceding discussion shows, it is necessary, first, to return more critically to the concept of identity in order to highlight the historical and contextual production of categories such as race, class, and religion and acknowledge what Sen points out are individuals' invariably diverse affiliations (*Identity* 23–25). Second, we must move beyond self-reflection towards more heterogeneous, dynamic, and open forms of reasoning that address, analyse, and criticise implication. And third, it is important to move beyond a purely negative assessment of power, towards one that acknowledges the simultaneity of its danger and potential. We need to consider the implicated subject not just pejoratively but as an important political category for the scrutiny of imperial intimacies and the struggle for reparatory justice.

Carby's biography and Rothberg's concept of implication play important roles in the increasingly wide-ranging and forceful debates concerning the demands for reparatory justice. Beckles highlights that the calls for reparations necessitate politically effective advocacy: "Reparations

have never been paid by economic elites to people who are disorganized, weak in political consciousness, and lacking collective political commitment in pressing their claim" ("Global"). Carby can help us revise Rothberg's concept of "implication" to extend and strengthen the global reparations movement.

Acknowledgements

Versions of this essay were presented in 2022 at the GAPS (Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien) conference "Contested Solidarities" in Frankfurt, Germany, at a Global Memories Working Group online panel in the same year, and at the "Global Complicities" conference in Dresden, Germany, in 2023. I would like to thank the audiences at all three events, the anonymous peer reviewers of *ARIEL*, and this journal's editorial team for their helpful questions and suggestions.

Notes

1 The work of Beckles (*Britain's Black Debt*; *How Britain Underdeveloped the Caribbean*), social historian Verene A. Shepherd ("Slavery, Shame"; "Jamaica and the Debate"; "Women, Slavery"), lawyer Bert S. Samuels, the Rastafarians in general, and Bob Marley in particular (Shepherd, "Past Imperfect" 37) has been crucial in forwarding the global reparations movement.

2 In his essay "From Warsaw to Gaza," Rothberg introduces the concept of "differentiated solidarity" as a form of solidarity that accepts and works across differences (526, 538).

3 Erll argues for the important role of mass media, such as literature, in shaping cultural memories ("Literature, Film" 389–90) and Rigney emphasizes the advantages that aesthetic works such as literary texts, have over historiographical writing in reaching audiences (347).

4 At the end of the twentieth century, increasing research on memory in different academic disciplines and across continents led to what numerous scholars describe as a memory boom (Erll, *Memory* 2–5).

5 Moran offers a more detailed discussion of the historical context within which the concept of identity politics emerged.

6 Rothberg does not take into account that some discussions of ontology include temporal and spatial conditions, as in the case of historical ontology. Hacking, for instance, writes:

> Historical ontology is about the ways in which the possibilities for choice, and for being, arise in history. It is not to be practiced in terms of grand abstractions, but in terms of the explicit formations in which we can constitute ourselves. . . . Historical ontology is not so much about the formation of character as about the space of possibilities for

> character formation that surround a person, and create the potentials for 'individual experience.' (23)

Historical ontology in this sense would work well to describe implicated subjects.

7 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, since the early nineteenth century the suffix "-ness" has formed "abstract nouns from adjectives, participles, adjectival phrases, and (more rarely) nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adverbs" ("-ness, Suffix"). This process of abstraction increases the effect of turning historical terms into seemingly metaphysical categories.

8 Carby (vii) quotes an earlier version of Hall's essay that is almost identical to the above quoted later version. One difference is the earlier version's "it is stories" (Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean" 8 [1995]) instead of the later version's "it is a set of stories" (Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean" 30 [2001]). While the plural of stories in the earlier draft already implies their diversity, the later addition of "set of" makes this point even clearer.

9 In his lecture *Reason Before Identity*, Sen explains this relation in more detail (30).

10 Rothberg also describes the recognition of implicated subjects as a form of "self-reflexivity" (*Implicated Subject* 19).

11 Lilla offers a different explanation for this historical development (59–95), but the Combahee River Collective's statement reveals the frustration and exhaustion resulting from wider public debates in the US during the 1970s.

12 In relation to the Caribbean, Tony Hall suggests that black US exchange students in Trinidad and Tobago were unable to see that they were privileged in comparison to the local population.

13 The life of the black feminist Michel Wallace, who originally published the statement quoted by the Combahee River Collective, illustrates this point. Wallace grew up in a middle-class family, went to a private school, and spent summers in Europe.

14 This point echoes Saar's argument about the necessity of diversifying forms of critique in the face of diverse forms of oppression (15–19).

15 Shepherd also emphasizes the vital importance of engaging in, widening, and strengthening public discourse ("Past Imperfect" 41).

16 Building on the philosopher Simona Forti's adaptation of Foucault's concept of power, Rothberg focuses on "those normative subjects who contribute to the production of violence and the propagation of power through less dramatic, everyday behaviors" (*Implicated Subject* 53). Although the concept of the implicated subject moves beyond Foucault's work by focussing on the individual subject as "a transmission belt of domination" (Rothberg, *Implicated Subject* 35), it continues Foucault's approach to power by describing its social realization in consistently and unequivocally negative terms.

17 Foucault continues by stating: "In fact, we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall

programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions" ("What is Enlightenment?", 316).

18 In an interview with Knittel and Forchieri, Rothberg defines implicated subjects negatively as "those subjects who play crucial, but indirect roles in systems of domination and histories of harm" (8).

19 Similarly, in an interview with Knittel and Forchieri, Rothberg reiterates the central role of global capitalism for structures of implication ("Navigating Implication" 9; 19).

Works Cited

Araujo, Ana Lucia. *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

Barrett, Leonard E., Sr. *The Rastafarians*. Beacon, 1997.

Beckles, Hilary McDonald. *Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*. U of the West Indies P, 2013.

———. "The Global Reparatory Justice Movement: 21st Century Enlightenment and the Legacy of the Amistad." *Africa Update*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2017, sites.ccsu.edu/afstudy/africaupdate/upd24–2.html. Accessed 7 May 2022.

———. *How Britain Underdeveloped the Caribbean: A Reparation Response to Europe's Legacy of Plunder and Poverty*. U of the West Indies P, 2021.

Bernstein, Richard J. "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophical Ethos." *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, edited by Michael Kelly, MIT P, 1994, pp. 211–41.

Carby, Hazel V. *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands*. Verso, 2019.

Combahee River Collective, The. "A Black Feminist Statement." *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, edited by Zillah R. Eisenstein, Monthly Review, 1979, pp. 362–72.

Eagleton, Mary. "Adrienne Rich, Location and the Body." *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2000, pp. 299–312.

Erll, Astrid. "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory." *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, edited by Erll and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 389–98.

———. *Memory in Culture*. Translated by Sara B. Young, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Forti, Simona. *New Demons: Rethinking Power and Evil Today*. Translated by Zakiya Hanafi, Stanford UP, 2014.

Foucault, Michel. "What is Enlightenment?" *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984*, edited by Paul Rabinow, vol. 1, New Press, 1997, pp. 303–319.

Fraser, Nancy. "Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative'?" *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, edited by Michael Kelly, MIT P, 1994, pp. 185–210.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing, U of Michigan P, 1997.

Greif, Mark. "What Was the Hipster?" *Against Everything*, Vintage, 2016, pp. 211–24.

Hacking, Ian. "Historical Ontology." *Historical Ontology*, Harvard UP, 2002, pp. 1–26.

Hall, Stuart. *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*. Duke UP, 2017.

———. *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*. Edited by Kobena Mercer, Harvard UP, 2017.

———. "Negotiating Caribbean Identities." *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, edited by Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl, U of the West Indies P, 2001, pp. 24–39.

———. "Negotiating Caribbean Identities." *New Left Review*, vol. 209, 1995, pp. 3–14.

Hall, Tony. Personal interview. 22 Mar. 2017.

Knittel, Susanne and Sofia Forchieri. "Navigating Implication: An Interview with Michael Rothberg." *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2020, pp. 6–19.

Lilla, Mark. *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*. Hurst, 2018.

Marx, Karl, and Fredrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*. Verso, 1998.

Moran, Marie. "Identity and Identity Politics: A Cultural-Materialist History." *Historical Materialism*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2018, pp. 21–45.

"-ness, Suffix." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, Dec. 2024, doi.org/10.1093/OED/7846540358.

"Parvenu, Adj." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, June 2024, doi.org/10.1093/OED/5994389929.

"Petit Bourgeois, N." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, Sept. 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2931572148.

Rauhut, Claudia. "Caribbean Activism for Slavery Reparations: An Overview." *Practices of Resistance in the Caribbean: Narratives, Aesthetics, Politics*, edited by Wiebke Beushausen et al, Routledge, 2018, pp. 137–50.

Rich, Adrienne. *Blood, Bread and Poetry*. Norton, 1986.

Rigney, Ann. "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing." *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 345–53.

Robbins, Bruce. *The Beneficiary*. Duke UP, 2017.

Rothberg, Michael. "From Warsaw to Gaza: Mapping Multidirectional Memory." *Criticism*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2011, pp. 523–48.

———. *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford UP, 2019.

———. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford UP, 2009.

"Navigating Implication: An Interview with Michael Rothberg." Interview by Susanne C. Knittel and Sofía Forchieri. *Journal of Perpetrator Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2020, pp. 6–19.

Saar, Martin. "Philosophie in ihrer (und gegen ihre) Zeit." *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–22.

Samuels, Bert S. "The Jamaican Case for Reparations: Against the British Government for Slavery and Colonization." *Time for Reparations: A Global Perspective*, edited by Jacqueline Bhabha, Margareta Matache, and Caroline Elkins, U of Pennsylvania P, 2021, pp. 59–74.

Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Harvard UP, 2009.

———. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. Norton, 2006.

———. *Reason before Identity*. Oxford UP, 1999.

Shepherd, Verene A. "Jamaica and the Debate over Reparation for Slavery: An Overview." *Emancipation and the Remaking of the British Imperial World*, edited by Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, and Keith McClelland, Manchester UP, 2014, pp. 223–50.

———. "Past Imperfect, Future Perfect? Reparations, Rehabilitation, Reconciliation." *Journal of African American History*, vol. 103, 2018, pp. 19–43.

———. "Slavery, Shame and Pride: Debates over the Marking of the Bicentennial of the Abolition of the British Trans-Atlantic Trade in Africans in 2007." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 56, nos. 1–2, 2010, pp. 1–21.

———. "Women, Slavery and the Reparation Movement in the Caribbean." *Social and Economic Studies*, vol. 68, nos. 3–4, 2019, pp. 31–59.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julie Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed., U of Minnesota P, 2010.

Wegner, Jarula M. I. "Hazel V. Carby: *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands*." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2022, pp. 178–81.

———. "Michael Rothberg's *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*." *Memory Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2021, pp. 551–58.

Welsch, Wolfgang. "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today." *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, edited by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, Sage, 1999, pp. 194–213.